

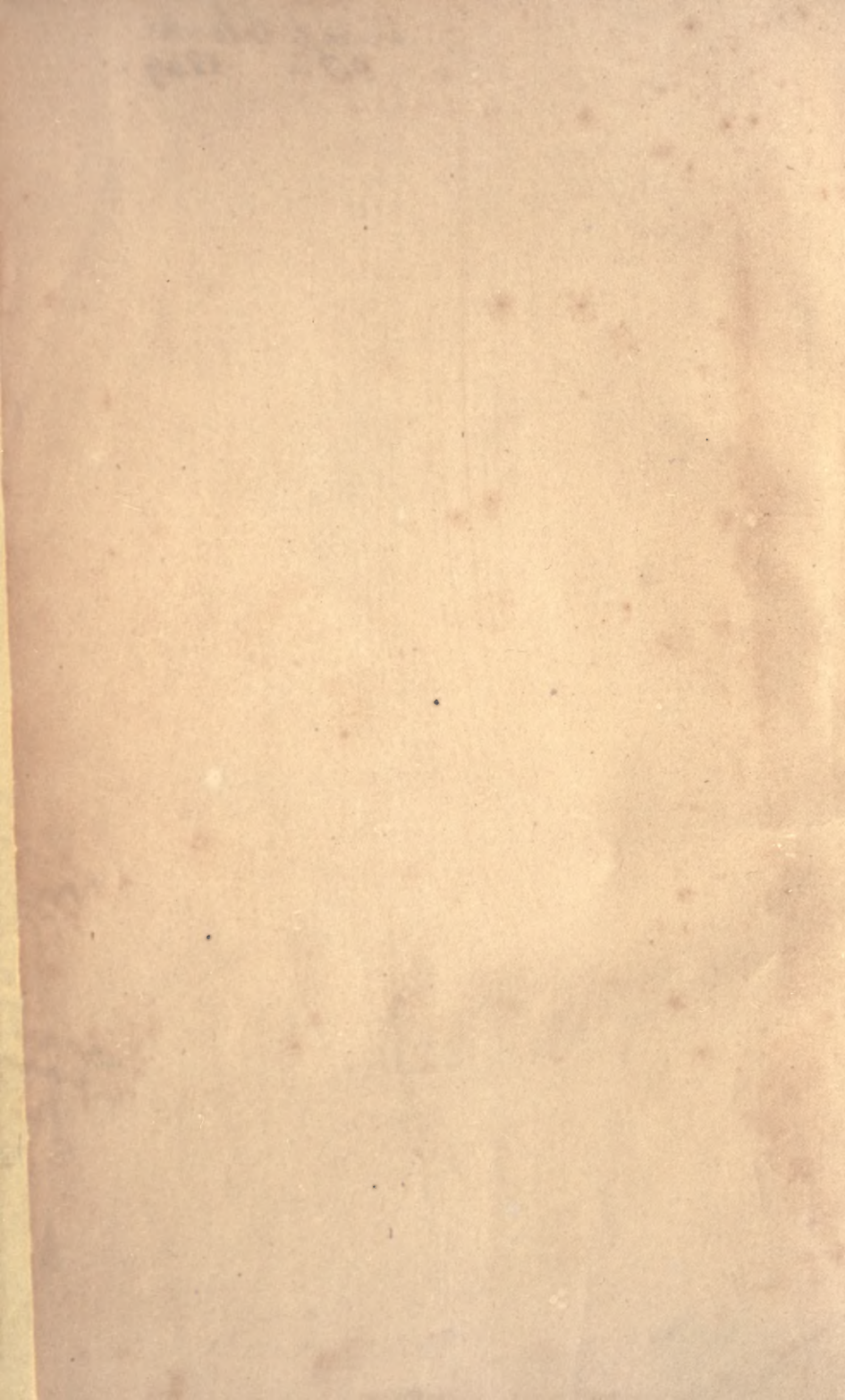
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LONDON:  
J & F. TALLIS, 100, ST JOHN STREET.



SOCIAL  
DISTINCTION.  
OR  
HEARTS AND HOMES;

BY  
*M<sup>rs</sup> Ellis*

Author of "The Women of England," "Family Secrets," &c. &c.



*The Widow's Child.*

LONDON :

J. & F. TALLIS, 100, ST. JOHN STREET.



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# SOCIAL DISTINCTION; OR, HEARTS AND HOMES.

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## CHAPTER I.



HE sun seems to be going down," said Michael Staunton, taking off his spectacles, and appealing to his silent companion, who, seated on the opposite side of the room, was plying her needle with great industry. At this remark, however, the young woman rose, opened the window near which she had been seated, and listening for a moment with great attention, again commenced her quiet occupation with the simple remark—"They do seem rather late."

The character of the scene of which these two individuals formed the only living portion, with the exception of a large greyhound sleeping on the hearth-rug, was as nearly resembling what is called by painters "still life," as any could well be, in which hearts are really palpitating, and the current of thought is actually moving on. It was the interior of an old English hall of the sixteenth century, more substantial than splendid; and yet not wanting

in those decorations of richly carved black oak, and tracery of small-paned windows, and cornice of elaborate workmanship, which, combined with other ornaments peculiar to the olden time, give a dignified, and sometimes even aristocratic character to apartments not otherwise embellished in any rich or costly manner.

Such was the case in the present instance, for Hatherstone Hall had undergone little change through many successive years, beyond what absolute comfort required ; and comfort being a word of relative signification, varying always with the tastes and habits of those most immediately concerned, the comfort of Hatherstone, at the precise time here alluded to, might scarcely have borne comparison with the comforts of the present day. It is true the apartment already described was not wanting in a massive table and sideboard elaborately carved, and high-backed chairs of the same description, which would have made the fortune of a modern speculator in these specimens of antique art ; but beyond these there were no superfluities designed for luxurious indulgence—not even a sofa, on which the form of high-born beauty might recline.

Judging from the present occupants of that apartment, however, it might readily be seen that a sofa would not be in very frequent requisition there. The figure and countenance of Michael Staunton, the proprietor of the mansion, were those of perfect health and vigour, scarcely impaired by the lapse of somewhere about seventy years ; although his fine head was bald, and his once luxuriant brown hair was softened down to a kind of neutral tint, by the mixture of thickly scattered silver threads. It still, however, curled with great beauty, where most abundant, and thus waved around cheeks and temples that were scarcely less handsome than in the days of



their youthful pride. Beneath the forehead, and closely shaded by compact and thickly set eyebrows, gleamed out at times such flashing eyes of piercing brightness, that few persons were aware of their actual colour, or would have believed it to be no darker than hazel-grey; in fact, so sudden and so powerful was the glance they sometimes shot from beneath the shadow of those overhanging brows, as to create a general belief in their being black—intensely black; or, as the country people more expressively called them, “black as sloes.” A well-made nose, thin lips of quick decision, and handsome rounded chin, completed the contour of this not unpleasant countenance; although, as Thomas, the old footman, farmer, and general factotum of his master, often observed, the squire was “pleasant, or unpleasant, just as the case might be. For his own part, he would rather push his head into a bee-hive, than have to go into the parlour when his master was in one of his fractious tempers.”

And so thought many others, in and about the household of Michael Staunton, although upon the whole he was an excellent master, who kept his servants long, and never turned a labourer or workman away for anything but theft, or falsehood. These were to him the two unpardonable sins, both much encouraged, he believed, by the extravagant and “up-ish” notions of modern times. He therefore waged perpetual war against all affectation, pretension, or assumed gentility; and to such an extent was this warfare carried, that in his own person and habits he rather kept behind, than in advance of, the customs of the times, adopting in his dress and mode of living a simplicity, and even homeliness, scarcely borne out by the ancestral dignity of his house, as it was still exhibited to view in the family portraits, with their richly-gilded

frames, which hung about his rooms. Indeed, some people went so far as to suggest, that even Mr. Staunton himself might be guilty of a little affectation in these extreme views, or why did he bestow such evident care in the preservation of these old paintings ; why did he take pleasure in telling such long stories about these same ancestors—their power with the reigning sovereign, their deeds of arms, their liberal charities, and all the pomp and ceremony with which they had been surrounded ? Why, indeed, except to draw a strong comparison between what he called the frippery of modern times, and real greatness ; and to conclude with his unfailing lamentation, that these days had all gone by.

Just in proportion as Michael Staunton abhorred all falsehood and deception, his admiration and his praise were directed to honesty, and truth. Acting upon this principle, he had married his servant for his second wife ; because, as he said, he could not find another *honest* woman, and he could not live alone. After the marriage of his last daughter, he had tried two or three lady housekeepers ; but the remarks he made upon their manners towards himself were by no means complimentary to the sex. He wanted, he said, some one to be kind to him in his old age, but kind in such a way as not to make him remember that he was the owner of a large estate, and had yet to make his will. He thought he had found this in one of the loveliest, and most faithful, of the class who labour for their daily bread.

To this second wife he had been married nearly ten years, and she was indeed a lovely picture of an honest woman of her sphere. Margaret was now about the age of thirty, comely, fair, and of considerable personal beauty, both as regards form and face. The latter was full of



patient, mild, and sweet expression. When perfectly grave, and that it almost always was, there was indeed but little to be read from its appearance; but with a smile upon the clearly-chiselled mouth, disclosing teeth of pearly whiteness, few faces could be more attractive, and none more kind in their expression than Margaret's; yet, some how or other, this smile was always gone too soon, and long in coming back, and in the interim, there was sometimes a slight contraction of the clearly-pencilled eyebrows, with a sudden look of suffering or pain—a short, quick sigh, and something like a shake of the head; but all this passed so rapidly that no one took much notice of it, or if they did, and if they asked the cause, Margaret had always her answer ready—she was thinking of the poor, the hungry, or of sailors tossed upon the sea; and knowing her to be a kind and pitying creature, people took her at her word; for Margaret was one who went with all her heart amongst the poor, and actually looked with her own eyes into their wants and their necessities; often observing, that as Providence had placed abundance in her hands, it was for her to use and not to hoard it, still less to spend it upon herself. And acting out this strong conviction, she kept to her simplicity of dress, retaining the comely 'kerchief and close cap which she had worn in service, only with the difference of greater costliness in texture and material.

Looking down upon this quiet homely figure, where she sate in the old parlour, was the portrait of a richly dressed and haughty seeming dame, the former mistress of that hall; and what a contrast to the present! Poor Margaret often thought that this portrait frowned upon her, and then she drooped her head, and felt as if she had no business there. She knew not—none knew but Thomas and his master, what had been the character and history of that lady.

Some said her reign at Hatherstone had not been peaceful : rather one of rights disputed, dignity assumed, and high pretensions questioned ; but she died early, leaving three children, two daughters and a son, to the care of a father whose prejudices her own character and sentiments had done nothing to subdue. Thus, her influence withdrawn, he was left at liberty to act upon any extreme which his own peculiar views might dictate ; but to do him justice, it must be stated, that he gave his three children what is called an excellent education, according to the popular meaning of the term ; sparing nothing for expense in their schooling, and even allowing them to acquire all that could be acquired in a limited period, of the most approved accomplishments of the day.

The eldest daughter, who had much of the advantage or the disadvantage of her mother's influence, and who had frequently accompanied her to fashionable sea-bathing places in the south of England, was an apt scholar in all that could recommend her to society as a clever, as well as a polished woman. Clever she unquestionably was, for she could compass almost any object upon which her heart was set. But along with this enviable capability, there was a trait of character still more to be desired ; for she could bring forward the best possible reason for everything she wished to do ; thus standing above or beyond all contradiction, with her name unbreathed upon by censure.

Next to this daughter, who rapidly grew up into a more than usually clever woman, was the son ; and then the youngest daughter Mary, her father's favourite, a truthful, sensible, and thinking girl, of whom her partial parent almost ventured to pronounce that she would grow up an "*honest woman*." Indeed, a father and a daughter could scarcely go on more happily together : Mary was devoted to her



parent's happiness, but unpretending in her affection for him; while on his part, he found in her clear and steady mind, her truth, and her tenderness, almost all that he wanted in a companion. What a pity, that such a happy and delightful state of union and mutual dependence should be broken up by the *first offer*! Yet so it was—the first offer came to Mary; her heart was weak, and she accepted.

Mary was not handsome, nor striking, and she thought less of her own recommendations than they deserved. She believed she was not vain, because her opinion of herself was very low; and thus a degree of gratitude was mingled with the emotions with which this first offer was received. More especially was this the case, because it came from a very prepossessing gentleman, whom she had met at the house of her sister, Mrs. Ashley, where he made himself the most distinguished in a party of considerable intelligence, throwing into shade so many individuals of whom Mr. and Mrs. Ashley had spoken in the highest terms, that Mary, with all her meekness and humility, could scarcely believe her senses, when, a short time afterwards, an actual proposal of marriage was made her by this very gentleman who had been so much admired, and who still appeared to hold a high place in public opinion.

From this opinion, however, Michael Staunton dissented widely and obstinately. Amongst his many prejudices, he hated America with a most cordial hatred; and the gentleman, after a residence of many years in that country, had but recently returned to settle in his native land, in a large commercial town, near to which the residence of Mr. Staunton was situated. It would be useless now, however, to expatiate upon the many painful scenes which took place between Mary and her father, before his reluc-

tant consent could be gained in favour of this connexion. It is quite possible that the difficulties of her position, attended as it was with some degree of harshness and unreasonable restraint, enhanced the attractions of her lover. However that might be, she became at length his wife ; and, at the time of which we write, was living in great plenty and apparent comfort in the town of M——.

Michael Staunton seemed doomed to be disappointed in his children. A short time before this bond was severed, his only son had married into what is called “a good family,” but without money, and, as regarded the choice he had made, without health. So much was the father opposed to this connexion, that he had never seen the lady, nor his son, since their marriage ; and when recently, intelligence was brought him of the sudden death of this son, the stroke was all the more heavy, from a secret consciousness of having indulged his vindictive temper at the expense of natural feeling, as well as Christian duty.

From these repeated trials Michael Staunton never recovered the equable tone of his mind. Instead of being softened by distress, his temper became more irritable, his will more imperative ; at the same time that his secluded life tended greatly to the strengthening of prejudices always too deep. Margaret was not a companion at all likely to correct these evils : she feared her lord too much ; and having once been his servant, she never could believe herself his equal. Neither is it very likely that he wished to be corrected. He had a right to have faults if he liked—what business had anybody to interfere with him ? Thus bristling up, and ever ready to repel intrusion, he met every event in life as if it bore some direct mission against himself, and was consequently something to be treated with suspicion, if not actually resisted. To many persons he



appeared a harsh and stern old man ; but there were a few who knew the real kindness of his heart, and how often he made a plea of what he called the *foolishness* of his wife for dispensing benefits amongst the poor around him, and offering food and shelter, where his own dignity would not let him stoop to offer it himself.

Perhaps no one knew more of the real heart and feelings of his master, than the man Thomas, an old servant of the household, who had lived in the family from his boyhood ; nor did any one know better the nice art of meeting his sternest mood in the manner least likely to offend.

It happened, however, on the occasion already alluded to when the master of the mansion had sat waiting for his tea until after the sun was set, that the equanimity of Thomas was more than usually tried. But of this, more in its proper place : for already Margaret has turned her head to listen to the sound of coming wheels ; the spectacles of Michael Staunton are laid for the twentieth time upon his open book ; the greyhound has started from his sleep ; and nearer and nearer still comes the rushing sound of a carriage, rolling rapidly over the wet gravel—wet with April showers, for it is that season of the year when the grass is fresh and green, and all nature begins to wear the brightness and the beauty of returning spring.

It was evident that neither the lord nor the lady of the mansion knew exactly how to conduct themselves on this occasion ; but Margaret, with her heart brimfull of hospitality, was already hastening to the door, without any imaginable purpose, but to offer her house and home, and everything it contained, to the service of the expected guest. Hurried on by these feelings, she stood upon the step, even before the carriage reached the door ; nor did

her hand shrink back, when parcel after parcel was thrown into it, and cushions, shawls, and umbrellas piled upon her arms, as if she had been the lowest menial of the whole establishment. Of all this Margaret thought as little as any one could possibly think for her. Lost in deep interest for the human occupants of the carriage, she counted not the accompanying articles of property; nor saw, in fact, a single thing, except a pale, proud, widow lady, with her face so deeply shrouded that little could be known of it except the cold and sad expression of its marble lips.

Strongly contrasted with this distant, and somewhat repulsive figure, was a child, a little girl of somewhere about eight years old, all eagerness and curiosity, yet evidently ill prepared to find her happiness in this new home; for nothing could induce her to leave her close and frightened hold upon her mother's dress. The lady had closely wrapped her arms around her child, in the attitude of one who kept a constant guard upon her, lest some unfriendly, or some vulgar hand should dare to touch a thing so delicate and so beloved; in this manner the silent party walked through the old hall, Margaret, with vain endeavours to be social, ushering the way. It was evident that Margaret was supposed to be a servant of the house, or if not actually thought to be so, it was evident the lady chose to have her suppositions thus interpreted; and therefore she walked forward along the passage which led into the parlour, silent still, nor condescending to make the slightest acknowledgment of Margaret's presence or attentions.

Those who knew Michael Staunton well, could easily have perceived, as he rose from his chair, and advanced a few paces to meet the tall and stately figure which now entered, that he had to make a strong effort to master the various and contending emotions which pressed upon his



heart. This then, was the widow of his son, and this the fatherless child! A single tear, a single affectionate expression, a single confiding look or act, would at that moment have mastered the strong man, and have bowed him almost to the dust. A single pressure of that child's light head upon his bosom would have burst the flood-gates of deep feeling there, and might possibly have made him from that hour a wiser and a better man. But there occurred no such crisis in the history of this family. That golden moment rolled away, unmarked, and mingled like other moments, with the flood of bygone time.

Just at the proper distance from the person of her husband's father, the young widow dropped the lowest curtsey which had ever swept the floor of that old parlour, at the same time presenting to the touch of his extended hand the tips of her thin fingers, and no more.

"And you,"—said Michael Staunton, not entirely repelled, for pity was the strongest feeling in his heart just then, and pity is ever patient and forbearing—"and you" he said, while looking down upon the child, and holding out the hand which had been so quickly disengaged. But the child, at least, had no concealment, no pretence, for, first she hid her face within her mother's dress, and then, with pouting lips and peevish countenance, looked out, and struck the extended hand with every demonstration of predetermined and obstinate dislike.

Margaret saw this, and was in horrors. Even the mother spoke a gentle pleading reproof; and looking round the apartment, begged to be conducted to her room. Here, it was Margaret's pride to show, that nothing had been neglected which thoughts of kindness could suggest. In every other department of her household, her efforts had been arrested by the frequent and imperative command,

to "make no difference—no difference in the world ;" but here she had worked unseen with her own hands, so carefully, that neither sound of foot nor hammer had been heard ; and yet the change was so complete, that often during the day she had run up into the room, just to delight her eye with gazing on the "perfect picture" she had made of it.

It was natural, after all this studious care, that Margaret should look round with something like triumphant joy ; "for what," she thought, in ushering her guest, "can possibly be wanting here ?"

"Oh !" said the lady, starting back, "am I to have no fire ?"

"The room is very dry and warm," said Margaret meekly.

"Yes, certainly," replied the lady, in a most peculiar tone, and with that little, short, *made* laugh which means a thousand unutterable things. "I had forgotten we were not at home."

"I hope you soon will be at home though," said Margaret very sweetly ; "and I am sure there should be a fire directly, if I knew how to have it made, without, ——"

"Without what ?" inquired the lady, "I see no difficulty."

"Without disturbing the sparrows' nests," said Margaret, glad to escape in any way out of her dilemma.

"Good gracious !" exclaimed the lady, "am I to have birds in my chimney, night and day ? I shall never sleep with birds in my chimney. I can tell you that."

So saying, she applied her delicate white hands to remove a fire-board, which occupied the centre space of one of those wide empty fire-places to be found in all old houses, on removing which, it was found that a quantity



of some kind of rude material had been thrust up the chimney, and had probably been there for years.

"I really don't think," said Margaret, "there will be any good in removing that; and besides, the tea is waiting. I dare say you will be glad of your tea after such a journey."

"*We* have not dined," said the lady, with a repetition of the short laugh.

Margaret now found her difficulties increasing beyond what she was at all prepared for. She had two parties to please, as widely different in their habits and modes of thinking, as if they had met from opposite hemispheres. There was no question, however, in her mind, which of the two must have the first consideration; so leaving the lady to adjust the affair of the chimney herself, she hastened down into the parlour, to see that her lord and master was no longer kept waiting for his tea. Here, however, she found, to her dismay, that things were even worse than above. Thomas was in close consultation with his master; and the old gentleman was listening, with contracted brow and flashing eye, and with those quick movements of hand and foot, which intimated the most fearful climax of irritation. Thomas, however, was well known as an excellent manager, and in him Margaret built her hopes of final adjustment, whatever the difficulties of the case might be; but in her haste to reach some happy conclusion, she overlooked the fact, that if Thomas could by skilful manœuvring keep all things right, and every one from blame, he would; but that if the question was, whether he himself, or some other person, should fall under condemnation, he hesitated no more than other men.

"Then what did you do?" asked Michael Staunton, turning sharply upon his man

"Why, I went to the landlord of the Nag's Head," replied Thomas, "and told him who I was, and as how, if he would just advance me ten pounds, my master would send it back by the next post; and I told him who you was, Sir."

"So you went in debt on the strength of my name, with a man whom I never saw in my life," said Mr. Staunton, in his most impatient manner.

"Why," said the man, "there was no other way open to me, that I could tell. The coach came up full inside; and when I just hinted to the lady that some people, some *quality* too, thought it pleasanter travelling on the top, you never heard such an uproar as there was between the mother and child—sobbing and crying! It beat me, Sir, to know what to do. The lady said she had never travelled in a public conveyance in all her life, but always with post-horses; and, bless you, Sir, there were packages enough to fill a stage-waggon."

"So you took a chaise, and borrowed money to pay for it?"

"I did the best I could, Sir. I knew you would be waiting, and expecting us, to-night; and if the money's any object, I would rather pay it myself than have more words about it."

So saying, Thomas turned to walk away, well knowing that a sense of injustice, forced upon the mind of his master, was the most likely means of effecting the desirable result, which he called "bringing him to."

Here then, the matter ended—if that might be called an end, which was but the beginning of a series of troubles and perplexities connected with the domestic arrangements of Hatherstone Hall, such, as Thomas often remarked, had never been known since the time of his



old mistress. "Then, indeed!"—— he was accustomed to add ; but leaving the sentence unfinished, would walk away, as if charged with thoughts too big for utterance.

And all the while the spring came on, and danced around the ancient Hall, with the melody of birds, and scent of opening flowers, and smiles that might have won an echo from despair. People said, that year, it was the sweetest spring-time ever known: the lilachs and laburnums bloomed together ; the hawthorn, white as snow, poured its rich fragrance on the floating air ; and the larks warbled so long and loud, that nothing else was heard but their triumphant joy, high up above the purple meadows—higher still, as if ambitious to be first to tell in upper sky, of all the freshness, bloom, and beauty of the grateful earth.

How was it, then, with that young child, who rambled at her own free will amongst the garden bowers, and sat at noon beneath the shadow of the old yew trees, and gathered primroses upon the orchard bank, or cowslips in the meadows, and came back to pour them into her mother's lap, richer than if she brought a coronet to grace her brow ? It was not in the heart of childhood to resist such sweet and genial influences ; and though the mother still remained the same, and kept aloof, as was her custom, from what she held as *vulgar* intercourse with those whose name she bore, the child enjoyed her happy holiday amongst the flowers, and wondered why her mother wept so much.

Perhaps it was not altogether grief that hung upon the widow's heart. A real, deep, disinterested grief is softening in its influence ; but hers was more like disappointment—gnawing, wasting, self-humiliation, and despair. Entirely removed from her native element, she seemed

to pine away for want of an atmosphere to breathe. To her the most crowded exhibition to which the fashionable and the gay resort, would have been a glimpse of paradise, compared with that dull garden, and its everlasting leaves and flowers. She had no heart for nature—no being, and no strength, when separated from the well-dressed crowd ; and she, who could have danced until the morning light came glimmering through the dust of smoky windows, was too weak and faint to tread those garden walks, and sat all day enveloped in her winter shawl, as if to shut out every ray of cheering sunshine from her heart.

In this, however, there might be some little self-deception ; for nature is more powerful than we think, and whispers through a thousand channels, what we cannot choose but hear. Thus often the sad heart is soothed even by the sighing of the wind—soothed while it knows it not, nor thanks the gentle visitant that brings it consolation—soothed while it struggles with a host of worldly cares, and dreams of nothing else. Thus, then, it might be with that sad and silent lady ; else why did she so often seek the quiet of that garden, where her favourite seat was hung around with rambling roses and rich honey-suckle ? Here she would sit all day, pleased only with one thing, the prattle of her happy child, who came and went like a bright vision, ever welcome to the mother's heart. Not that the child was beautiful ;—many fairer and more attractive played upon the village green ;—nor kind, nor loving ; for Margaret tried in vain to win her confidence and affection ;—but she was *all* the mother had—a scion of an honourable house—a vestige of brighter days of splendour and distinction, now for ever gone. The pining, fretful mother, struck with poverty and widowhood at once, had now no hope on earth ; but for



the child there was prosperity in store, and riches in more abundance than her mother's family had ever known ; and, with the true ambition of a woman, the widow spent her solitary hours in weaving webs of future splendour to adorn her child. Of these, that old Hall, with its rich, and broad, and fertile acres, always formed an essential and important part.

With such possessions what might not the future yield of honourable distinction, and with that distinction how much of what the mother's heart had ever panted for ? The question of deep interest, if she could but have known it, was, how far she was able, at that early age, to impart her own feelings to her child—how far she was capable of working against those happier influences which the world of nature was now so bountifully diffusing around.

The garden at Hatherstone with its spring flowers, the drooping laburnums, and the richly scented lilacs ; the lambs at play upon the green banks of the neighbouring meadow ; the mingling songs of merry birds, and the bright sunshine overhead—all these sweet influences exercised an irresistible power over the mind of the widow's child, notwithstanding the fretfulness and murmuring of her disconsolate mother, and the sorrows that were so often poured upon her young heart. The spirit of little Kate Staunton was one not easily depressed ; and though she would sometimes endeavour for a moment to look very properly impressed with the unhappiness of her mamma, and would even try to produce a tear or two, by much winking, and compression of her eyelids, she was very quickly gone again, bounding after a butterfly, or tossing up her bonnet amongst the blossoms of the cherry-tree, to frighten off some beautiful bird, whose gay plumage had attracted her quick and penetrating eye.

But the most hopeful symptom which her character displayed to the watchful mind of Margaret, was a more respectful approach, at times so near the master of the mansion, as to look up into his face ; not with impertinence, but with an evident desire to cultivate a better acquaintance. Nor was Michael Staunton indifferent to such advances. He had once been fond of children, and a natural kindness still clung about his heart towards those who bore not their faults upon their own heads, but were what others made them. Thus he had more than once held out his hand to little Kate, without being so rudely repulsed as on their first interview ; and sometimes even, when seated in his favourite chair in the old parlour, she had stolen silently into the room, and, with a gentleness somewhat foreign to her habits, had even ventured to lay her hands upon his knee, as if inviting his attention.

One day, in particular, Margaret had watched the child, as she did this, with more than usual interest. Mr. Staunton had been reading ; but he turned his eyes from the open book to the earnest countenance of the child, with such an unusual expression of affectionate regard, that Margaret at last began to hope

“ What do you want, child, with me—with an old man like me ? ” asked Michael Staunton, in his kindest manner.

“ I want you to talk to me, ” said Kate.

“ What about, child ? ” was the very natural inquiry. “ What does your mother talk to you about, ” he asked, without any design whatever of prying into their habitual confidence.

“ Oh such a many sad things, ” replied Kate ; “ so sad I cannot tell you. ”

“ And not one thing pleasant ? ” asked Margaret, who was leaning over the back of her husband’s chair, and



listening with the most agreeable anticipations. "Not one thing pleasant?" she asked again, hoping to elicit a more favourable view of the intercourse between the mother and the child.

"Yes, one;" said Kate, after taking a moment to think.

"And pray what is that?" said Michael Staunton, laughing with the utmost good humour, amused only to think that any human being should have but *one* pleasant subject to talk about. "Pray what is that, child?"

"We talk sometimes," said the unconscious Kate, "about the time when I shall be mistress of all this beautiful place, and live like a queen, and show people how a lady ought to live. Only Mamma says she shall be laid in her grave then. Poor Mamma!"

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## CHAPTER II.



VERY different scene must now be presented to the reader's notice in the town residence of Mrs. Ashley and her family—her prosperous, blooming, hopeful family, of every member of which, the mother had some distinguished feature to display, incomparably superior to anything displayed by others. Or, if at times these favourite traits of character fell absolutely far below the mother's commendations, they were brought out, forced upwards, as it were, by some ingenious contrast cleverly applied ; not with ill-nature : no, Mrs. Ashley was all kindness, blandness, plausibility, ever looking on the bright side of everything and everybody ; only there were degrees of excellence, and in the measurement of these was her great point of skill.

"My dear," said Mrs. Ashley, to a pleasant, gentlemanly-looking man who took the master's place at the breakfast table, "I hear our poor, afflicted sister and her child are gone to Hatherstone."

"Yes," said Mr. Ashley, "and I rejoice to think they have found so kind a shelter there. The child will be pleasant company for the old gentleman ; and as for Isabel, it strikes me she will not long be a sufferer in this world."



"Ah! poor dear soul," sighed Mrs. Ashley; "I really do not know that one could wish it otherwise; but I confess, I do feel very much concerned about the child."

"In what respect?" inquired the gentleman.

"In every respect," replied the lady. "Her education, you know, can never be conducted there; and even if my father should attach himself to her, it would only be to impart to her his own prejudices, and quite unfit her for the world."

"And what of that?" observed Mr. Ashley, laughing, with the most perfect good nature. "If he leaves her sole proprietress of Hatherstone, she will be fit for the world there, at all events."

"How perfectly absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashley.

"Absurd, indeed!" echoed all the young voices around the table, "unless she is rather more agreeable than when we visited at my uncle's."

"I never saw such a piece of conceit and selfishness," observed one.

"So plain, too," observed another.

"So rude," exclaimed another.

"And altogether intolerable!" summed up the eldest of the Ashley family, a youth of exceedingly precocious intellect, and manners better fitted for the age of twenty-four than fourteen. And yet he was a very handsome fellow. That was quickly seen—seen by himself too, and by no means lightly thought of. It was therefore in perfect keeping with the general tone of his character and mind, that he had already begun to talk of "dancing with Miss A——, and flirting with Miss M——," and so on, through all the rest of that most interesting class of subjects usually selected by youths of this description. Not that Frederick Ashley was incapable of anything beyond

this. To do him justice, it must be acknowledged, that he inherited much of his mother's cleverness ; " more of his mother's head, than of his father's heart," was sometimes said of him ; for with men of sense, and especially with men of business, he could talk knowingly and well ; so that many people envied Mr. Ashley the possession of a son so likely to become the main-spring of the flourishing and extensive business of which his father was the head ; " instead," the wise and prudent used to say, " of being like those wild and extravagant young fellows, who think their father's money only gained to be squandered upon their pleasures. No, Frederick Ashley was not one of these. He was well dressed, and well mannered ; but he was attentive to business, and not extravagant ;" and therein lay the crowning virtue of his character.

The spring of youth being fresh and warm within his veins, and health and beauty on his brow, and all things prospering around him, Frederick was indeed no unfavourable specimen of what is called a fine, high-spirited, and handsome youth. His parents, and his sisters, appeared equally proud of him, equally compliant to his wishes, equally solicitous to win his favour and regard. But of all those who, young as he was, paid him these ill-judged and injurious marks of high regard, there was perhaps only one who really loved him—his little cousin Lucy Lee.

A boy is seldom more amiable than when his tyrant will and boisterous impulses are softened down by association with some gentle loving child, who makes herself entirely dependent upon his forbearance, as well as his protection. Thus, the close companionship and devoted attachment of a sister much younger than himself is often like a gleam of sunshine in the heyday of a boy's experience ; and pity it is, that the ridicule of school com-

panions, or the spirit of the world in any other form, should divert from his path so innocent, so healthy, and so natural a light.

Lucy Lee was like a little silken-haired fairy, walking by the side of her tall cousin, and never so happy as when grasping his hand within her tiny fingers, trotting along with her two steps to his one, looking where he looked, admiring what he admired, or measuring her little shadow in the sunshine with his. It would have been difficult to say *why* the child loved him so much; for she had a kind, good brother of her own, and she loved him too; but scarcely as she loved her cousin, who was to her the perfection of all beauty and excellence of every kind. It is true her brother did not lord it over her, did not make her fetch and carry as her cousin Frederick did; and Lucy, in her fairy character, was apt at this—a very sprite to bring the thing most wanted, at the point of time when most acceptable. She was so light too, and so rapid in her movements, yet so still—so like a sunbeam coming in with gladness in her look or laugh, and then away again—lost in the shadow of some passing cloud; for if there was but a cold word, a look ungentle, or the slightest symptom of repulsion, Lucy was gone as quickly as she came; her little heart shut up, and folded in, as some fair flowers will close beneath a cloudy sky.

Happy was it for Lucy, that her home was one of those in which it seemed but little likely that sorrow or privation should ever come. The favourite of her father, and his constant plaything during the few leisure moments he allowed himself, she had learned to chide away his anxious looks, and charm him back to cheerfulness and good humour, if ever he spoke angrily, or appeared dissatisfied. While yet a baby, she had learned a trick of laying the



soft palm of her small hand upon his cheek, and, with the lulling murmur of some inarticulate song, humming herself to sleep. This habit still continued ; and when tired of play, and glad to be at rest, she would creep upon her father's knee, and laying her shining ringlets on his bosom, lift up her hand, and tune that fairy song, which always seemed to soothe the busy heart—beating, sometimes how rapidly !—beneath the pressure of her cherub face.

Never was the mother of little Lucy more happy than when she saw her husband thus calmed down ; for he was one of those active and enterprising men who seldom know a moment's relaxation from the urgent claims of business ; not simply in its details, but in its wider range of speculation and commercial interests. Mr. Lee was called a first-rate man of business. It was his ambition to be such ; to buy in a larger quantity of raw material than any other gentleman of his own standing ; to have more spacious warehouses ; and altogether to conduct his affairs in a sweeping, dashing, fearless manner, which startled the more wary, and made the envious often whisper to each other about his ways and means. In this kind of element he found his outward life ; his inward being had to find itself, if found at all.

Mrs. Lee had been, as a daughter, most affectionate, devoted, and faithful. She was prepared to be the same, only in a higher degree, as a wife. She was not a woman of violent emotions, still less accustomed to clothe her feelings in romantic or exaggerated expressions ; but they were perhaps the stronger, and the deeper, from the habitual restraint under which they had always been kept back from public exhibition.

“ Poor Mary,” Mrs. Ashley used to say to her daughters, “ takes every thing so coolly. How happy she must be !

But then you know, girls, she does not feel as *we* feel. One cannot have everything ; and with her calm and beautiful manner, one must not expect much heart."

The heart, however, was not wanting ; as some wrinkles prematurely growing upon Mary's brow could testify, had they been capable of describing whence they came. It was the work of years, though but comparatively few, each, with its months and weeks, developing some new feature of her married lot, for which she had been wholly unprepared. This process of development was still going on. The wife was still learning, though without any precise consciousness of what it was that she learned. One feature of this lesson, however, was sufficiently apparent—its self-renunciation.

Mary had always believed that she was humble, painfully humble, because she thought meanly of her own attainments, and knew that she was not handsome ; but she fancied, that when once married to a man who loved her, as *she* was capable of loving, she should be raised, built up, and established in a more comfortable opinion of herself ; that she should then be *somebody*, and fill a place ; feeling her own value, because others felt it. With a heart full of affection, and habits of thought and action which gave her confidence in making what is called a "good wife," she hesitated not to accept, as has already been stated, her first offer ; more because she believed it to be the lot of woman to be married, than because she knew of any points of character in which her future husband's was likely to assimilate with hers. The *last* thing she thought of doing was to *reason*, to use her *common sense* ; the *first* thing was to try and love the very prepossessing young gentleman who had offered her his heart and home. In this Mary certainly succeeded ; and

then the use of her common sense became considerably more difficult.

*Common sense, for common things.*—Would that the world, with all its improvements, could enforce these words as a motto for the upspringing of a true, intelligent, and enterprising youth. It may be said that *love*, about which we have been talking, is not to be classed amongst *common* things. And suppose it is not; does it follow that every offer, or even half the offers that are made, must necessarily be attended, in the first blush of their propounding, by real love, on the lady's side, at least. No; in nine cases out of ten, there is sufficient pausing time allowed—a most precious interval, in which, if ever in her whole life a woman has need to exercise her common sense—she has need to ask, why should I make this change?—why should I tie myself to the companionship of this man for life?—what is his natural disposition, for it is with that I shall have to do?—what are his tastes and habits?—can he be everything to me which is essential to my happiness, or I to him?—but above all, will this man help me to improve my character, enlarge and elevate my mind, and finally assist me in that preparation for a better and a higher world, which is the great business of our lives in this?”

On all these points, a woman's common sense, if rightly used, and used *in time*, may assist her to decide; yet in the case in question, it is more than probable, that Mary scarcely *thought* at all; she only *felt* a secret wish to be admired, and loved, and cherished; and thus she entered upon her unknown course with as little real acquaintance with her husband's character as if she had married him by proxy, having only heard his name.

In the home to which Mary was taken, there was every-



thing to please her fancy and attract her eye, a degree of modern elegance to which she had been but little accustomed, and which was therefore the more imposing and influential, as it affected her feelings and character. Until this time, Mary had been remarkable for the simplicity of her dress and manners. She was considered a good manager and economist, and perhaps secretly prided herself a little upon her ability to make a husband's income go as far as possible. Unfortunately, this excellent and not *too common* qualification was entirely wasted upon Mr. Lee. He thought it mean, and scrupled not to say so, for persons in their circumstances to be troubling themselves about the expenditure of "trifling sums." If the thing was necessary, buy it, and say no more about it, especially if the Ashley's had it; for though the two families were the best friends possible, there seemed to be a sort of running account kept up between them: if one had a good thing, the other must have better, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

It is so easy, too, to buy, when nothing has to be paid for at the time; so pleasant to go into a fashionable shop or warehouse, and say, "Just send me this, or that," the price being of no sort of consequence. And though this way of doing business was at first quite startling to the prudent Mary, she fell in with it in time, and found it saved a world of trouble.

But though Mary was naturally prudent and economical, she was also generous; and, in her father's house, had been allowed to give a great deal amongst the poor. "If then," she thought, "I can purchase at this rate, with what abundance I can give!" That these two channels of enjoyment do not always flow in exact proportion with each other, was one of the new lessons which Mary had

to learn ; and which, it may be added, she found it both difficult and painful to acknowledge as the rule of her own life. Gladly indeed would she have lived in the midst of drawing-room embellishments not half so costly, to have been allowed to bestow a portion of the price upon the humble and necessitous. Nor could she possibly be brought to understand her husband on this point, that he should be so lavish in some expenses, so scrupulous in avoiding others. Perhaps, she thought, the poor did not interest him. Perhaps he had lived always in great cities, where the poor are only seen in masses, and their private wants are less conspicuous ; and thus she told him long, but simple tales about her father's peasantry—the poor who occupied his cottages—old men and women, whom she used to visit in their lowly homes ; and, warming with her subject as she went on, and as her somewhat lonely heart expanded with the memory of by-gone welcomes, she would sometimes suddenly look up, and see her husband's finger half-way down a list of figures ; or more frequently his head thrown back, his eyes weighed down with sleep, and all his senses closed against the pathos of her story.

And Mary never was angry, nor ventured to awake her husband suddenly, when he had served her thus ; but more frequently would gently place a pillow under his head, and pity him, that business had so many troubles and fatigues. Still her eyes were opening, and they continued to do so, day by day, and year by year ; for Mary had a share of common sense beyond what is usual, only she had failed to use it at the proper time.

Whatever might be her portion, as a wife, as a mother no one could be happier than Mrs. Lee ; and perhaps, if the whole truth were told, no one could be prouder ; un-

consciously to herself, however ; for pride she had always regarded as something foreign to her nature. If, therefore, she fell in with all her husband's tastes and wishes in her dress and style of living, it was with the most entire belief, on her part, that she was influenced by no other motive than the desire of pleasing him ; that, for herself, she could have been quite as happy in the humblest cottage on her father's estate ; and that to bring up her children wisely, and perfectly regardless of these things, was her great object, as a Christian mother. Hence Mary was in the habit of admonishing her children very seriously against excessive vanity or pride, in any shape ; and when this lecture had been duly gone through, they were dressed for their morning's walk, and sent out upon a public promenade, where their nurse knew well, and they knew also, that no more beautiful or well-dressed children would be seen.

Arnold Lee, the elder of the two, was not perhaps so tall or graceful as his cousin Frederick Ashley, nor was he generally considered so handsome ; but he had a more open and expressive countenance, a more noble forehead, and eyes so clear and full of truth and energy, that no one bent upon a mean or wicked act would have liked to encounter his steady penetrating gaze. In his figure he was rather firmly and compactly made, though remarkably agile. His limbs were well formed, and powerful in the extreme ; and with the most perfect good humour, he had a tendency to use them sometimes in no very gentle manner, especially in cases of oppression, where he fancied he could rescue the feeble from the strong. With such a companion, his sister Lucy always felt as if she had a champion by her side who might defy the world ; and more than once the strong arm of her brother Arnold had been lifted to



avenge what he conceived a threatened injury to this beautiful and too tenderly fostered child.

As it often happens in families, without any breach of natural affection or duty, so it was with the Lees, that the daughter appeared to be the father's favourite, the son the mother's. While the surest solace to the wearied man of business was the gentle figure of his playful Lucy flying into his open arms, so there grew, between the mother and her boy, a deeper feeling entertained by both, though seldom given vent to in any outward demonstration. To protect her little daughter from every touch that might sully, every contact that might harm, seemed to be the great object of the mother's solicitude and care ; but her boy was so cheerful, so bold, so prompt, and so determined, that she felt at times almost as if he stood in the place of her protector. At all events, she had a secret feeling of safety when he was by her side ; and when her domestic lot seemed enveloped in mystery and doubt, there was a directness, a truthfulness in the fresh and open manner of her son, which afforded serenity and peace to her often troubled soul. If it had been possible for the mother in the sunshine of her prosperity, and with health in every feature and movement of her two happy children, to contemplate the dark picture of death, she would have dwelt upon the loss of her little Lucy with tearful tenderness, imagining all the sad details, with something of poetic interest mingling with her grief. But had the thought presented itself that Arnold must be taken from her, she would have shuddered and shrunk back, as from a future impossible to be endured.

It was very different with the father. As the boy grew, and gained upon all other hearts, his father's seemed to close against him. He seldom spoke against—seldom in-

deed spoke of him at all ; but one thing was observable to the fond mother, that he never laughed when Arnold laughed, nor asked about his sports or lessons ; sometimes, too, he turned upon him sharply, and with such a look ! Arnold for some time, happily for him, did not appear to feel or understand this look ; for some time too, being a bold fellow, he did not choose to care for it ; but when he saw his mother watch it, and her eyes fill with tears, though she said nothing, a kind of light began to flash upon him ; many things, unnoticed at the time, came back clothed in a different character and meaning ; and, burdened with a sense that something must be wrong, he often pressed, in a grave thoughtful manner, close to his mother's side, as if wishing to ask her something, but scarcely knowing what.

One morning—it was a memorable morning to the mother and her boy—the children had been walking in their accustomed place of exhibition, where Lucy was admired by so many beholders, that the nurse, without being forbidden by her mistress, was always proud to take them there ; an old man, miserable looking, and meanly dressed, had seated himself upon one of the public seats, and seemed evidently watching the two children with no common interest. Lucy was afraid of the strange figure ; and when the old man saw that she was so, he lifted up his stick, and spoke gruffly to her, in a manner which made her run screaming to her brother for protection. Arnold, who was rather too fond of taking into his own hands the adjustment of everything which appeared to be going wrong, as soon as he had comforted his sister, walked up to the offended man, and asked him how he dared to be so rude to Lucy. A few words followed, not very conciliating on either side, when the old man rose up and turned away,

but not before he had looked at Arnold with a peculiar expression of contempt, bidding him remember that "pride must have a fall."

All the circumstances of this adventure were related by the children on their return home to dinner ; and long after Lucy had been soothed into forgetfulness of her fears by the caresses of her father, the haughty and indignant spirit of Arnold continued to rise to his lips, with fresh expressions of impassioned energy, as he dwelt upon the scornful look of the old man, and even described his dress and manner in contemptuous terms, as if endeavouring to justify his own frankly expressed longings to be avenged.

"I should have liked to knock the old man down, Mamma," said he at last, "and I think I could, too."

But this bravado was cut short, by a sharp and terrible drag at one ear, from the hand of his father, who had risen from his seat as if for the purpose of taking a book from the shelves ; and while tears of actual agony started into the boy's bright eyes, and the deepest crimson rushed up to his cheeks and brow, he uttered no complaint, but sat with lips compressed, as if forcibly shutting in the far more poignant agony which thrilled through his young heart.

Little Lucy, who had seen all this, remained silent only as children do when taking breath for a long cry, and turning round to meet her mother's open arms, both children escaped with her into another room, where Arnold, no longer master of himself, found relief in the feelings which he could not—dared not utter, in a plentiful flood of tears.



## CHAPTER III.



THE only human being who appeared to be at all acquainted with the position of Mrs. Lee, was a female servant who had lived with her from the time of her marriage, and whose eyes were of that watchful description which sometimes see too much. Annoying as this tendency occasionally proved, and much as her mistress often wished to shroud herself and her domestic affairs from such penetrating scrutiny, there was so much of sympathy mingled with this close watching, such true attachment to herself and her children, and altogether the mother was so poor in that which her servant alone seemed able or willing to supply, that the evil, if it really was such, was borne with for the sake of keeping up the feeling, that she was not utterly alone.

And yet she *was* alone; for in the sorrows that lay heaviest at her heart, there was no safe or proper sympathy for her in the whole world. Mary knew this, and she asked for none. She would not have listened to a word directly expressive of such feelings from any one; still less would she have trusted her own lips to utter a complaint; but often when her spirit was most cast down, when her

struggles were the most severe, and when she scarcely dared to think, there was a secret pleasure in the kind personal attentions of this servant, and in that intercourse with her, which, while it never touched upon her own position, dwelt so tenderly upon the children, and upon everything connected with their welfare, that the mother naturally learned to love the woman who could bestow such faithful care upon those who were dearest to her on earth.

On one subject alone did Betsy fearlessly, and without reserve, betray the nature of her feelings as they had been necessarily biassed by the aspect of human life presented to her view. It was a subject of no unfrequent occurrence in the nurse-maids' sphere of intercourse ; and, considering her strong prejudices, it was a little curious that Betsy should so often introduce it herself. This however was always done with a certain defiant toss of the head, accompanied by sounds and signs of contempt, as if she said, " Marry me who dare ;" nor was her tongue the less eloquent, each time the subject was discussed, for having every day of her life expressed her detestation of matrimony in the abstract, as a thing to be eschewed by all who wished for a happy, or a peaceful life. She, for her part, had seen enough of it, she often said ; " and a little too much," she would murmur to herself, in an under tone, leaving very little doubt in the minds of the other servants that she had one particular case especially in view ; though at the same time she would have suffered martyrdom, rather than have betrayed a syllable which she considered injurious to the interests of the family with whom she lived. But though Betsy's tongue would sometimes play her false in this manner, her heart was always true to whatever cause she espoused—true to her mistress and her

children, and true to the single blessedness in which she lived, and meant to live, in spite of all mankind.

Like most persons of the same openly avowed sentiments, Betsy had little charity to spare for those who acted upon opposite principles. She spoke of a wedding as the most melancholy event of a person's life; and if invited to attend one, always threatened that it should be in a suit of deep mourning. A death, she said, was nothing to it. People were done with then, and, it might be, well out of the way; but to get married was to begin life again, with another person's troubles added to your own. Thus, to ask assistance from Betsy towards preparing for an occasion of this kind, was indeed to bring upon the individual who should venture so far a storm of no ordinary description; and yet she had a brother who had made this daring experiment, and made it with some advantage to himself; for amongst her other good qualities, Betsy was an excellent economist, both for herself and others; and the earnings of her long and faithful service were not unfrequently the object of earnest application, in the way of loans for the commencement of business, or other speculations, always represented as the most hopeful in the world.

"Let me see the business begun first," was Betsy's uniform reply, except in the case above alluded to, when the softer portion of her heart was so penetrated by the pleading of an only brother, and the mention of his marriage so kept back, that she was at last won over to venture, what was for her a considerable sum of money, in the establishment of a business which her brother assured her again and again *must* necessarily succeed. It is true the choice which he had made of a companion and helpmate in the affair was not exactly to her mind. It is true she would have greatly preferred, as she said, "an industrious, hard-



working young woman from a respectable service ;” but as her brother told her that the business required some one a little above the common run of servants to look after it, Betsy was willing to admit that he might possibly be right. It seemed a little strange to her, however, that, in connexion with a business begun entirely with borrowed money, and commencing on such an extremely precarious foundation, the wedding which soon followed, should be altogether such a stylish one as to be the talk of the small village where it took place, for the space of at least one entire month ; nor was she less surprised, when, on first visiting the married pair at their new home, she found the house furnished with every pretence to gentility—with carpets on the floors, and with chairs, such as she could not help remarking, would have better beseeemed her “ master’s library.” But the sofa was that which most excited Betsy’s indignation. She could not even name its name, but alluded to it, as “ that thing that filled up the room, and was no use to anybody.” And she had lent her precious money for all this !

When the bride appeared, things were no better, but rather worse—“ flowers in her cap—lace—*real* lace upon her shoulders, and silk to her back ! And what was she ?” Betsy thought she might as well have been married herself, as have lent her money for all this ; and full of such prudential thoughts, she hastened back to the town an hour before the time she had intended, for the purpose of consulting a lawyer as to the better security of that precious sum already so unprofitably expended.

Commencing life in this manner, James Burton found himself, like many others similarly circumstanced, extremely short of money ; yet with claims upon his purse continually increasing. His wife was delicate, as well as fond of dress ;

and every year another twig was added to the olive branches already blooming around his scanty board.

"It never does for people to come down," was the plea which James perpetually used in vindication of his struggles to keep up a genteel appearance. "All the world would say we were short of money,—that custom was falling off—and then they would come down upon us like so many sharks. No, no, Betsy, it would not do for us to look like people that don't know how to pay their way."

This, with many similar observations, had been made to Betsy one evening, during a long and not very satisfactory walk with her brother, in which he opened the conversation in a more than usually affectionate manner, stating that he wanted to talk about old times—that he had not been quite well of late, and that even when a man was married, there was nothing like one's own kith and kin, after all.

"I could have told you that, four years since, come Michaelmas;" responded Betsy, in a tone but little calculated to invite farther confidence.

Trusting to the soft place in her heart, however, James still went on.—"There's that little Betsy of ours, if it was not for her lameness, the very picture of her aunt. Nobody knows what a trouble and expense the poor child is to us; and so sensible too; the pity is she can't be learning something, for she'll never work for her living, that's very certain."

"And why doesn't she learn?" said Betsy. "It is high time she did, according to my way of thinking."

"Oh dear!" said James, "we've enough to do to pay her doctor's bill; and the baths they order cost a world of money. We can never think of schooling while all this is going on."

"And what should hinder her mother teaching her, I wonder?" exclaimed Betsy.

"Bless your heart!" said James, in an under tone, "she's no scholar herself, let alone wanting time. I don't mind telling you, Betsy, because we've always been so near and dear, you know—indeed I almost wonder how I ever thought of marrying, seeing that I had you—consequently I don't mind saying to you what I never said to any body else, that my missis never had no schooling herself; and, between you and me, can neither write nor read."

"I guessed as much!" exclaimed Betsy, stopping short in her walk, "I guessed as much, by the place she came from; and yet she must have her flowers in her bonnet, her silks, and her satins—her carpets, and her"—

"Stop, stop," said James, "the poor woman must not be blamed altogether, for what is not her fault."

"Then whose fault is it?" exclaimed the sister, far from being pacified.

"No fault at all of any body's," replied James. "It is you that don't understand things, sister Betsy."

James could scarcely have hit upon a more unfortunate method of explaining himself. "Not understand things!" Why, if there was one woman upon earth who understood things, it was Betsy Burton. So the hopes which James had entertained of borrowing more money, were all extinguished for that day, at least.

By the time the brother and sister had arrived at this stage of their earnest conversation, the evening was far spent; and they had wandered beyond the precincts of the busy town where Betsy lived, a considerable way down an obscure lane which led amongst a number of small houses, and humble dwellings, scattered almost all the way between this town and the village where James Burton carried on



his once promising trade. It was not a pleasant path for a female to be walking upon alone at that hour, nor would Betsy have gone out so late, but at the earnest entreaty of her brother, who pleaded his desire to speak with her on very important business, and promised at the same time to see her safely home.

Just at that turn of the conversation, when he put away the thought of mentioning his important business until a more auspicious moment, they had reached an old garden-wall, surrounding some low dwellings, and so overgrown with ivy in that particular spot, as to give an additional appearance of gloom to a place which in other respects looked dull and unfrequented, and as if the homes within that enclosure were tenanted by occupants both poor and miserable in the extreme.

"Hush! what was that?" said Betsy, holding up her hand; and they both involuntarily crept nearer to the overhanging ivy, listening to some mysterious sounds which reached them from the other side of the wall.

At first these sounds were like earnest, half-suppressed whispers, as of persons in anxious consultation upon some subject of importance; but they became gradually more angry than earnest, and then grew louder at times, as if the speakers lost their regard for secrecy in the agitation and vehemence with which they spoke.

Neither Betsy nor her brother uttered a syllable to each other, their attention was so intensely absorbed by the few words which alone and with much difficulty they were able to distinguish. These, however, they both understood so far as to know that they expressed some earnest entreaty made by one party, and as earnestly refused by the other. They perceived, too, that a faint light, as if from a lantern, was glimmering over the sprays of ivy, which increased

their curiosity to see as well as hear what was going on. Finding, at last, the frame of a crazy door, which opened through the wall, Betsy was the first to apply her penetrating eye to the chinks in this shattered fabric, although, as she whispered to her brother, she could see nothing but an open passage into an old house, upon which the feeble light was shining. The figures of the speakers she could not see. They were screened by a projecting part of the wall ; but she heard them talking still, and was quite sure that one must be an old man—"very old, to judge by his broken and feeble voice."

"Indeed," as Betsy said, "it was pitiful to hear an aged person pleading in that manner. She did believe there must be something wrong going on—perhaps theft, or murder, or something worse—she would call the police, that she would."

Whether it was the increased earnestness with which Betsy spoke, or that the listeners had stirred the leaves of the ivy in moving onward towards the door, it was evident that those who were within the garden had begun to be alarmed. Their voices ceased on the instant, and the light which had gleamed upon the wall of the old tenement, was either extinguished or dashed to the ground. They thought the latter, for a quick sound was heard, like a falling lantern, and at the same time a half suppressed exclamation, resembling a groan, from the old man ; while a rush amongst the ivy immediately followed, and the figure of a man springing over the wall was the next instant seen. Before either Betsy or her brother had time to speak, however, the figure rushed past them, and was soon lost in the darkness of the gathering night.

The two listeners stood as if rooted to the spot, neither of them for some time venturing to speak. "Let us look again," said James at last, "and see that all is right."

So saying he applied himself again to the crevice in the door ; and by this time, the moon having risen from behind a heavy cloud, a clear light fell directly upon the low garden, and wretched tenement, so that the entrance, where the door had before been open, could now be distinctly seen.

“ What do you see ? ” said Betsy to her brother, in a voice which sufficiently indicated the agitation of her mind.

“ I see a very old man,” replied James, “ standing with clasped hands, and looking upward to the clear moon.”

“ Has he a loose coat on, with large buttons ? ” asked the sister.

“ I think he has,” replied her brother. “ He is feeling for the lantern now—the lantern that was knocked out of his hand by that thief who leapt so nimbly over the wall. I wonder whether he has been robbed—or whether we ought to call the police ? ”

“ Robbed ! ” exclaimed Betsy ; “ I should not think that likely.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because no one would live in that wretched place who had any thing to be stolen.”

“ But we don’t know what the place may be inside. Besides which, I recollect now that I have heard people talk of an old man, that lives somewhere hereabouts, and buries his money in his garden. This must be him, Betsy. I’ll bet any thing it is the very man.”

“ And if it be, James, he has not been robbed, at all events, or he would raise the neighbourhood.”

“ Why, so he would ; I never thought of that. I’ll look once more, however, and see that all is safe, for he may be murdered yet, for any thing we know.”



"Not if he is seeking for his lantern, I should think."

"You've no feeling, Betsy. I never heard a woman talk as you do. I think, as people say, you were born before nerves were in fashion. If my poor Emma had been here, there would have been no need to rouse the neighbourhood, I can tell you."

"What is the old man doing now?"

"I can't exactly see; but if you'll just let me lay my hand upon your shoulder, I can look over the top of the door, and then I shall see all. Come nearer, Betsy. Why, what's the matter, girl? you're shaking like an aspen bough. What is it, Betsy dear?"

"It's because I've got no nerves, James."

"There you are, joking again, Betsy; and your teeth chattering in your head, for all the world like an ague fit. Ah! there he is again. Well, that's some comfort. He can walk, at any rate. There's not much the matter with *him*, that's clear; for he is now walking straight in at his own door, as if nothing was amiss, after all this hullabaloo. So let's you and I walk home, Betsy; for it's getting late, and Emma will have more questions to ask than I can answer; for if I tell her all to-night, she'll neither sleep nor let me sleep either."

"I would rather walk home by myself to-night, James. You had better make the best of your way to Emma, and try and keep her from questioning you too closely, even *after* to-night."

"What! Betsy! keep all this strange history from my wife?"

"Why not?"

"Because she's a woman, and a married woman; and if there be one unpardonable sin against the married state, in Emma's mind, it is the sin of keeping any thing from

her knowledge. No, no, Betsy, I know my duty better than that, and what makes peace, and keeps it, which Emma says is the same thing as duty."

"But you can't tell her all, James; and to tell only a part does often more harm than good."

"Why can't I tell her all?"

"You can't tell her what kind of a man that was that jumped over the garden wall."

"Can't I though?"

"Why, can you? Perhaps you will tell me, if you can; for I saw him so indistinctly."

"There you go again. Women are women, I believe, all the world over. I tell you what, Betsy; I don't like to say any thing to you about that man, you shake so terribly."

"Yes, tell me all you know—all you *absolutely* know; I ask no more."

"Well, then, he was a huge, big, robber-looking man. I am not quite sure whether he had a drawn sword in one hand; but I would not mind taking my oath before a grand jury, that something bright flashed in my eyes, like our best teapot."

"Go home to your wife James," said Betsy, "and tell her all you know; it will do neither her, nor any one else, much harm."

So saying she hurried away from her brother in an opposite direction, at so swift a speed, that all attempts to overtake her would have proved fruitless, even had he tried. In this, however, he was less enterprising than might have been expected; for being seldom so rich as at the present moment in information for the wonder-craving Emma, his great object was to make the most of his newly-acquired agreeableness, by relieving himself of the bur-

den of his story, without loss of interest by loss of time.

After leaving her brother, Betsy did not hasten home so quickly as might have been supposed from her manner of parting from him. Her great object was to be alone, unembarrassed by his conversation, which was never of the most lucid or intelligent description. This point she had gained without much difficulty ; but she stopped many times before reaching her master's door, absolutely to gather together, into some distinct form, her scattered and distorted thoughts.

Was it possible, she asked herself, that she could have been mistaken in the figure which had rushed so hurriedly past her ? There are times when we think the truth, to which our senses bear witness, the least possible of all things ; and thus we doubt our own powers of perceiving what is true. Little as Betsy had ever doubted hers before, she could not, on the present occasion, prevent a slight suspicion, that even her sharp piercing eyes had been mistaken. And yet the impression remained the same—the profile of that face—the outline of that form, as it flew past with lightning speed. No ; every time she thought of them, her strong conviction was renewed. But then, again, the thing itself was so improbable—impossible. Her master there, at that late hour, contending with a poor helpless beggar-man ; the same man—for in this she felt sure there was no mistake—the same man who had more than once annoyed the children in their walks, and, oftener than they were aware of, had regarded them with peculiar attention ! There was a mystery in these circumstances, when linked together, which the faithful servant could not solve ; and, in all probability, for the first time in her life, she half suspected, what her brother had so



recently told her, that even she herself did not always "understand things."

It is wonderful how much the mists of such a doubtful state of mind are sometimes cleared away by entering upon the actual scenes of our own daily life: and no sooner did Betsy find herself treading the broad well-lighted passages of her master's house, than the whole scene which had flitted so strangely before her was for a while dispelled; and she entered upon her accustomed duties without any apparent change in her habitual state of mind. Her first object, however, was to ascertain that all was right; and, for this purpose, she hastened to that part of the house which comprehended more especially the sphere of her interests and occupations. Here she found every thing in its accustomed order; and her confidence again revived, that she had been mistaken in her previous impression.

"Where can you have been, so late?" said the trembling voice of Arnold Lee, when the nurse went her usual round, to see that the two children were safe, and sleeping well. "Mamma wanted you so much," continued he, looking round to see that nobody was near, but the faithful friend to whom he sometimes ventured to unbosom his early cares.

"What did your mamma want me for?" asked Betsy, with great anxiety in the expression of her countenance.

"I hardly know," replied Arnold, lifting up the bed clothes to his lips, as if to keep the words he had to utter from being too distinctly heard—"I hardly know, but there was something, I am quite sure, more than common—something very sad."

"Did your mamma weep, dear?"

"No, Betsy, not that I saw. But you know, one does not like to look for tears."

"What was it then, dear boy? Do tell me, and be quick."

"When papa came home, Betsy ——"

"What time *did* he come home? Can you tell me that first?"

"I think it was about ten o'clock. But why do you start, Betsy, and look so? He never asked for you. Indeed I don't think he knows you have been out."

"How did he seem when he came in?"

"That is what I want to tell you, but I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I scarcely know myself."

"Tell me something, dearest—you make me quite unhappy by speaking in this strange manner."

"Well, Betsy, he came in as usual, for anything we knew. Lucy was gone to bed, and I was playing a game of chess with mamma; so that after we had spoken to him, as you know we always do, though he made scarcely any answer, we turned to play our game out, mamma saying in her good-natured way, that we should soon have done, for I was taking all her best pieces; so we played on, but somehow or other, it seemed to me, as papa was standing near me, with one arm on the mantelpiece—it seemed to me, that he was breathing hard like one who had been running fast; and looking up, I said 'what have you been doing, papa; you seem so flurried?' Just then, I caught a sight of his hand, which was bleeding, and foolishly I jumped up from my chair, and caught hold of it, to see what was the matter, exclaiming pretty loudly, that he must have been in the wars."

"And what did he say to that?" asked Betsy.

"Oh Betsy!" said the terrified boy, "I have seen my father in a passion before, but I never saw anything like his passion then."

"Against you, my poor innocent?" said the faithful nurse.

"Against me, and one more innocent still—my mother. Oh Betsy, I am so tempted sometimes."

"Tempted! how, my dear fellow?"

"Tempted to rebel against my father—tempted even to strike him, when he speaks in that way to my mother. What shall I do, Betsy—I feel so wicked when this temptation comes upon me?"

"You must say your prayers, dear. You must ask to be forgiven, as you forgive them who trespass against you."

"Ah Betsy, but that's my difficulty. If it was against me only, I could bear it—at least I think I could; but my mother, who is so good, and so patient, who never says a wrong word in return—I cannot—and I will not bear that."

"Ah! don't say that, dear. There are many things we *must* bear, that we don't like, and many things that are wrong too, both to ourselves and others—all as God pleases, you know, dear; for these things don't happen without his knowledge. And if there was no wickedness in the world, the Bible need never have been written. So go to sleep now, like a good boy, only say your prayers again first, and put in something about your dear mamma, and that will comfort your poor heart."

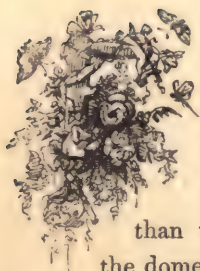
It was in this manner, and through the help of his well-meaning and kind-hearted nurse, that Arnold Lee first learned to put something into his simple prayers about the mother whom he loved so tenderly. He learned, too, the comfort and satisfaction of doing this, when he could do nothing else to serve her. It is true he was of a disposition that would naturally have prompted him to use more direct and more violent means for her protection or defence; but he was not so foolish and self-willed as to sup-



pose that anything which his young arm by its mere physical force could accomplish would be of efficient service even if extended on her behalf. His submission, however, was only half submission—a feeling that he could not help himself, or his mother ; and when he turned his head upon his pillow that night, and fell unconsciously into a pleasant sleep, he was more indebted for the peace of the succeeding hours to the healthy reaction of a vigorous frame, than to any very deep or lasting impression which the act of prayer had left upon his mind.

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## CHAPTER IV.



FROM the residence of the widow lady at Hatherstone Hall more cares and perplexities arose than Margaret, in the simplicity of her heart, had ever anticipated. Two parties to please, and they so opposite, might have puzzled wiser heads than that of the good housewife who ruled the domestic affairs in that hitherto peaceful establishment: and every day, as different traits of character developed themselves, the complicated web of difficulties, in which poor Margaret was involved, became more perplexing, and her situation altogether more anxious and irksome. In the midst of these troubles, the ingenious Thomas was her only friend; but he had imbibed so many of his master's prejudices, and had besides so profound a contempt for what he called "penniless matches," and assumption of dignity or importance without the firm foundation of well-stored coffers, that the unreasonable requirements of the unfortunate widow found but little toleration from him; and the frequent murmur, to himself, as he went about the house and garden, of "penniless matches," ending always with, "— when people bring a fortune, it is a different thing," announced but too plainly

that little mercy and less sympathy were to be expected from him. So far, however, as any management of his might help to avert a storm, or keep his master in good humour, he stood by Margaret as her firm friend; and beyond this, she knew better than to trespass upon his forbearance. Possessing in her own character just so much tact as is naturally supplied by great delicacy of feeling, but no more, she not unfrequently betrayed the very thing it would have served her purpose much better to conceal: thus, when Isabel Staunton complained of the inconveniences or privations of her lot, Margaret was generally prepared with an answer which would have been all-sufficient for herself, that she had no *orders* to do otherwise, or to *allow* any thing different. Against such a reply, her own meek spirit would never have entertained a rebellious thought. The wish of the master of Hatherstone Hall had ever been her rule of right—his will her law; and it was impossible for her to imagine the case could be otherwise with any one so situated as the widow who was now sheltered beneath his roof.

Margaret little knew what was passing in that widow's mind, nor how every allusion to the strict authority of the lord of that mansion galled her wounded feelings. It was evident, however, that the separation between her and the father of her husband was becoming wider every day, and that no effort was made on either side to render it less. The child, too, had sadly fallen from the height once attained in her grandfather's regard, by the most unfortunate allusion which could possibly have been made; and, since that luckless day, no effort on her part ever won him to linger near her in her walks, or even to bear the familiarity of her touch, if it could easily be avoided. That fearless and childish acknowledgment had occasioned



a breach in their intimacy not likely to be healed. It admitted, in fact, of no apology; it could not be explained away. It was the simple truth which the child had told, but all the less acceptable for being true.

Isabel Staunton never knew what it was that had driven away her child from the old man's heart. She did not even observe that his manner towards her was changed, so little interest did she really feel in anything which transpired within the walls of that dull house; so seldom, too, was she visited by any apprehension about the certainty of her daughter, the only child of the only son, inheriting the Hatherstone property, that she scarcely thought it worth her while making any effort to conciliate the present proprietor; and thus her own habitual behaviour, though it inflicted upon him but little annoyance, in consequence of their living so separately, was in no respect calculated to win either his confidence or his affection.

"I cannot tell what makes grandpapa seem always so angry with me now," said Kate to her mother one day.

"Because he is cross with every one," replied the mother.

"Oh! no, indeed, he is not; he is never cross with——" The child hesitated.

"With Margaret? you mean," said the mother, for she had never taught the child to use any other name.

"Yes, with ——" continued Kate, still unable to use an expression which she felt to be wanting in respect from her; and she already had begun to love the kind and gentle Margaret too well to speak of her when absent with anything but right consideration. "I don't see," she continued, "how any one could be angry with her."

"You are very fond of being with that woman, I think," said Isabel.

"Why do you call her woman, mamma?" asked the girl.

"Because she is not a lady," replied the mother, laughing in her peculiar manner ; "and never can be one."

"What is a lady, mamma?" asked the girl.

"You will really wear me out with those strange questions of yours, Kate. Do think a little while, and then answer them yourself. It will do you a great deal more good than to be always asking me."

"If kindness makes a lady," said the child, as if talking to herself, "I am sure she is one ; and gentleness, and a soft low voice, and a quiet step ; these are things you talk to me about, mamma, and she is almost perfect in these. Don't you notice how she brings you the new milk every morning herself, tapping gently at your door, and walking into your room as softly as a shadow? You know you told me it showed more respect to bring things to you myself, than to send a servant ; and she might send a servant if she liked ; she is the mistress, I suppose."

"Go and play, Kate ; you weary me," remonstrated the mother, a second time ; for she was soon wearied with any mode of reasoning which established an unwelcome truth ; and whatever she had prepared herself and her daughter to expect from the vulgar habits and associations of the family at the Hall, she could not but acknowledge to herself, that in the essential characteristics of good breeding—gentleness, delicacy, and regard for the feelings of others—Margaret, the simple unpretending housewife at Hatherstone Hall, was in advance of many fashionable ladies distinguished by birth and title.

There is a class of persons, and no small one either, who are always rejoicing in the fulfilment of their own dark prophesyings ; who would rather be able to say, of the most disagreeable event in life, "That is just what I said would happen," than be compelled to acknowledge that

they have been what is called "agreeably disappointed." This was in some measure the case with Mrs. Philip Staunton: she had made up her mind that a low-born woman like Margaret must necessarily be coarse, vulgar, and even ridiculous, in her assumed character of a lady. But simplicity without assumption is seldom ridiculous; and at the same time that the widow was deprived of the only source of amusement which she had promised herself, she found that Margaret possessed also a kind of innate sense of dignity and propriety, which kept her from offending the feelings, or exciting the ridicule of any one. It was hard to dislike her for this; and yet Mrs. Philip Staunton was unreasonable enough to feel for some time almost as if she had been deprived of a right, or robbed of a promised pleasure, because she could not, with any show of propriety, abuse the woman to her child.

While these feelings, unconsciously to herself, were rankling in her heart, far different ones were taking root in that of her little daughter Kate. Happy in her country life, and in all the pleasant sights and sounds which delighted her charmed senses every day, she knew no greater enjoyment than to run, with her hand in Margaret's, after the poultry, the dogs, the cats, the farmyard cattle, and to mix herself up with all the stirring life, and every-day interest, which grow around a large country residence: and if sometimes the state of her dress, her shoes, her hands, or hair, when returning from these rambles, was offensive to the mother's eye, she contented herself with the belief that the smell of cows and of newly turned-up earth was considered beneficial to the human constitution; and that her child might be laying in a stock of health, likely to fit her all the better for the dignified and honourable position she would afterwards be called to fill.



There are some children of whom, in early life, it cannot by any possibility be pronounced what they will be. Kate Staunton was one of these. Nobody could say that she was handsome—that she possessed even the slightest pretence to beauty; and yet her little peculiar-looking face, without one touch of rosy colour in the cheeks, attracted more attention than many that were far more beautiful. Her mind and manners were, to some extent, of the same character. People sometimes said of her, as if surprised at themselves when they did so, “*I like the child;*” while, on the other hand, when she happened to be disagreeable, there were those who had no mercy upon her grey eyes, and hair that would not curl, except as her mother made it: that, of course, in the wild country life she was leading, could be only for a short portion of every day; and when her dress was torn, which was not unfrequently the case, by her scrambles over “bush and brae,” her face scratched by the claws of a young kitten, and her hands and arms tanned to a mixture of brown and purple, by the combined agency of sun and wind, the country people were apt to think that the child of the pale proud lady would have been in no respect distinguishable from the children of the poor, except for the superiority of her dress.

The cost of supplying this, at a rate of destruction which may better be imagined than described, formed no inconsiderable item in Margaret’s additional expenditure; while all her little hints on the subject, so carefully thrown out before the mother and child, and always with the most scrupulous fear of giving pain, were either too delicate, or too remote, to produce the slightest effect; nor were the anxieties of Margaret at all relieved, or her disappointment softened, by the frequent observation of Thomas, “that the child was a queer child—old fashioned and pawkey—just the

child to have come over the old gentleman, if it hadn't been for that unlucky speech of hers, about *owning the property after his death.*"

It was with considerable excitement, though it could scarcely be called with pleasure, that Mrs. Philip Staunton heard, about this time, of the expected visit of the Lees at Hatherstone. The intercourse kept up between herself and these branches of her husband's family had been extremely slight, nor had she the least expectation, or even wish, that it should ripen into intimacy. She had heard much that was favourable of Mrs. Lee, and sometimes, in her desolate widowhood, with evidently failing health, she did feel a secret wish to have some human being to converse with, to whom it would not be too great condescension to complain; but, on the other hand, she dreaded the disturbance of more children to contend with, and was always afraid of any intimacy which her own daughter might form.

"The future heiress of Hatherstone no doubt has charms," she often said to herself; "and no one will know better than these aunts and cousins how to turn them to account. I should not have cared so much for Lucy, that little beauty whom one hears perpetually cried up,—but a great boy!—it really seems quite a liberty to me to introduce a great boy on the footing of a cousin, without consulting me."

Happily for the expected guests, these strange and most unreasonable thoughts, were whispered only to the leaves and flowers, or to that secluded chamber in which Mrs. Philip Staunton spent the greatest portion of her time, in a kind of listless inaction, which of itself would have been sufficient to destroy the health of a much more strongly constituted mind than hers. Yet even had it been pos-

sible for the leaves and flowers to convey to other ears the discontented murmurings which, at times, escaped almost unconsciously from her lips, Mary, her amiable sister-in-law, had so profound a sense of the loneliness and destitution of her widow's lot, that no absurdity on her part would have weighed for a moment against the warm sympathies already burning for expression.

In the figure, countenance, and manners of Mrs. Lee, there was, without beauty, so much of the bearing of a perfect gentlewoman, that Mrs. Staunton found it impossible to withstand the cordial expression with which she accompanied her first advances towards a closer intimacy ; and such was her habitual patience in listening to complaints, whether reasonable or otherwise, that the widow soon began to feel as if some lucky chance had sent her the exact person, whom, above all others, she most wanted—a person a little beneath herself, and yet a gentlewoman—a person who evidently had no troubles of her own, and who, consequently, could afford to listen to the troubles of those who were less fortunate.

People talk sometimes of the earnestness of the listener, the eagerness with which the head will turn to hear, and to know, and the length of time that can be thus lingered away without weariness ; but have they ever compared all this with the talker—with the look and manner of one who delivers herself, under favouring circumstances, of a long pent-up and selfish grief ? Let all hearers who are thus situated, look well to their supply of daylight, gas, or fire—to the clock upon the chimney-piece, or to anything that can with propriety mark out the limits of human endurance ; but to one thing they need not look, to the natural winding up, from exhaustion or weariness, of the speaker.



It was thus in the garden walks, and fields about Hatherstone Hall—in the parlour when the master was away, and often in the bed-room of Mrs. Lee herself, the same low, humming, earnest dolorous sound, always concluding, when circumstances rendered it impossible at the moment to go on, with—"you don't mind listening to me, I know, you have always been so happy, so fortunate yourself. And besides, they tell me, you are so good, so fond of doing your duty, and all that. So you must know that it is the duty of those who have no griefs themselves, to listen to the griefs of others. For my part, I have had a double share;" and the afflicted speaker would then apply her delicately-scented handkerchief to her eyes—"always a double share, and such unkindness too, with feelings too finely strung for a cruel world like this."

For a considerable length of time, Mrs. Lee kept up a large supply of real sympathy for her afflicted relative; but she began at last to be troubled with a wandering of her thoughts, for which she chid herself with great severity; and, rushing back to the subject in hand, would ask, in her kind soothing way, some question calculated to elicit more and more of that exhaustless history of slights, and injuries, and provocations, from which her rebel thoughts would fly away again—away to her own home, and especially to some transactions there, which whenever she thought of them, sent an aching thrill through all her joints and limbs, almost like the quick poison of a sting.

It was not sorrow that was the strongest feeling in her troubled soul just now. It was a combination of many deep emotions, not easily defined, of which fear was perhaps the one most frequently predominant; for she had bound herself to a duty, the very thought of which was repulsive and terrible to her in the extreme. Late on the

evening before she left home, a sad evening to her, her husband had laid upon her his command, that she would make use of the most favourable opportunity during her visit at Hatherstone Hall, to solicit a loan of money from her father ; and, although at first she resisted the charge in the bare form of a command, her husband had gone into such urgent and powerful reasons *why* it should be made, that her fears were awakened as they never had been before ; and while she believed implicitly in his assurance that a comparatively small sum, if immediately granted, would entirely remove the pressing difficulty, she knew that to hint such a thing to her now kind and indulgent father, would be to renew old grievances, and to open again the wounds which all parties appeared equally anxious should be healed.

Of all the hard duties which present themselves in woman's experience, and to perform which requires in some instances a degree of heroism beyond all calculation greater than that which is required of man in his ordinary avocations, perhaps none has ever been found so difficult, as to take the first steps towards an acknowledgment, that in following the dictates of her own heart, she has made a wrong, or foolish choice ; and to do this in the presence of that very parent whose authority was despised, or whose advice was disregarded in the following out of her own wishes. How many painful, wretched feelings are comprehended in this act, the sufferer in question had bitterly to experience, as she put off from day to day, the fearful duty so imperatively laid upon her, thinking on every favourable opportunity that one still better would arise, and when there occurred no opportunity either favourable or otherwise, rejoicing in the transient happiness of not being able to speak to her father, even if she desired to do so.

Michael Staunton had no suspicion of what was torturing his daughter's mind. He had never been more kind, or more attentive to her, than on this occasion ; and it is probable that the contrast presented by her conciliating cordial manner, and that of the reserved and haughty widow, tended greatly to restore her to the place she had formerly held in his affections.

But the great solace of Mary's heart was to watch the springing up of kindly feelings, and familiar intercourse between her father and her children. Arnold, with his frank and open manner, sometimes won upon his grandfather so much during one day, that it seemed almost impossible to lose his advantage on the next ; but he had a constitutional boldness in maintaining what he knew to be right, which often thwarted the old gentleman's humour, and jarred upon his irritable feelings, so as to make the best friends of Arnold tremble for the consequences of his free speech and fearless manner. It was evidently a very nice point to decide, whether his grandfather would take him trustingly and entirely into his favour, make him the companion of his rural occupations, the prop of his old age, and finally, the inheritor of his property ; or whether, in some fit of momentary vexation, he would dismiss him altogether from his heart and home.

It would have been too much to ask of human nature, of a mother's nature in particular, that Mary should look with perfect equanimity upon these fluctuations in the fate of a child for whom she already felt, and feared, so much ; but whatever might be the nature of her secret hopes and fears, they were buried deeply within her bosom, and found no utterance from her lips. Indeed, beyond the simplest admonitions that her children should pay every possible mark of respect to one whose age, station, and



relationship alike demanded the utmost consideration, she never trusted herself to the expression of a single word ; though she sometimes thought within herself, that Arnold's father would have been provoked almost to madness, could he have seen how little care was exercised on the part of the boy, to curb his towering spirit in the presence of his grandfather, simply because he was a man of large property and strong feelings, not difficult to win over to affection, when a favourable impression had once been made.

With Lucy Lee the case was very different. She had no high spirit to curb, no strong passions to keep down. Gentle, timid, and playful as a bird of spring, she could no more offend, than could one of those sweet warblers. Of such extreme personal beauty too, untainted by the least mixture of pride or affectation, it was impossible for any one to look upon her without loving her ; unless indeed, the very charms she so unconsciously exhibited, awakened an opposite feeling in some envious mind.

Perhaps it might be so with the widow. At all events she did not take kindly to the child, nor could be brought to see it otherwise than impertinent in Lucy, to run and meet her grandfather, or leap upon his knee, and hang around his neck, while her own daughter scarcely dared to venture near him ; and as this difference grew, and became painfully evident to others besides herself, it would have been difficult indeed for Mrs. Philip Staunton to maintain a good understanding with her sister-in-law, but that Mary still continued to be the patient listener, ever at her side, watching her feeble health, and attending to her wishes with all the assiduity of affection, if not with affection itself.

Nor was this task by any means a light or easy one.

There are some women who will be, and do, and suffer, anything, rather than sink into obscurity and neglect ; and if they cannot be admired, they will at all events excite consideration in one form or another. Indeed as a whole, they appear to prefer consideration to any other feeling which can be stirred up amongst their friends, or society ; and with an ever greedy appetite for distinction, they are often satisfied to excite uneasiness, anxiety, and alarm, in those around them. They will even risk a little illness, rather than be entirely overlooked, and greatly enjoy the éclat of being pleaded with, nay, even reproached, by kind and considerate care-takers, for their carelessness about catching cold, and incurring risks to their health in a thousand other ways. Thin shoes on wet evenings form a desideratum with ladies of this description. In going out upon the water, or in an open carriage, they neglect to take an extra shawl on principle ;—more especially, if they are known to have a sore throat, or cough ; and if there be one article of food which they know will make them ill, they have a passion for that very thing, and decline touching any other. It is not sufficient, however, with these persons, that they do such things ; they delight to tell of having done them ; and often smile, and look exceedingly animated and triumphant, while thus engaged in disclosing their interesting peculiarities ; for in this manner a considerable sensation is occasionally got up—a precious life is endangered, a human being has to be preserved from self-destruction ; and there is always a sufficient number of persons in society, influenced by the passing emotions of the moment, to produce a scene in favour of these thoughtless, dear, imprudent creatures, who cannot be induced to think about themselves.

Alas ! for Mrs. Philip Staunton, she had once done this

to perfection, while a crowd of anxious friends had thronged around her, ever ready to offer the extended hand to save her, or even to deprive themselves of necessary comforts to supply what she had left behind ; but she was then the wife of the only son of old Mr. Staunton, of Hatherstone Hall : she was the widow now, and the old man had a capricious temper, and she had never been a favourite.

Besides enjoying all the luxury of Mary's kind attentions, there were other sources of satisfaction beginning to cheer the widow's heart, which indeed she had been some time anticipating, but which, though late in reaching her, were not unwelcome. It had been matter of surprise to Mrs. Philip Staunton, that her arrival at the Hall had not been acknowledged by all the surrounding neighbourhood, and for some days she had sat in hourly expectation of carriages rolling up to the door, with at least inquiries, or cards, or some other token of respect towards so distinguished a guest. The habits of Mr. Staunton, however, had so long shut him out from this kind of intercourse, that the arrival of the new residents beneath his roof, was scarcely known beyond the circle of his own domestics ; and when gradually the news had spread to families occupying a higher position, some questioned the propriety of calling, others thought the proper time had passed by, and the greater number settled it in their own minds, that they were not called upon to know anything about what took place within the household of that crabbed old gentleman. Thus it was, that the proper time did really pass away, until the appearance of Mrs. Lee and her children at the village church, when Mary, who had always been a favourite both with rich and poor, was greeted with a general welcome, and the natural consequence ensued, of morning calls,



almost numerous enough to satisfy the widow's pining heart.

A good deal of curiosity was also excited by Mrs. Philip Staunton herself. An elegant woman in mourning weeds, if in the slightest degree amiable and prepossessing, is an object of deep interest to every feeling mind : and Isabel could be all this, where she considered it worth her while to be so. A great and important change was thus produced in the affairs of Hatherstone Hall. Carriages were frequently rolling along the road which had previously been silent and untrodden for days together ; and all things began to wear a different aspect. The master of the mansion declared he had no place to be quiet in. Thomas was hurried up stairs and down, continually out of breath with this new exercise, and consequently unable to complain. Horses, dogs, servants, and everything connected with the household, were kept in a state of perpetual excitement ; while the widow herself began to whisper her belief, that " it might, under some circumstances, be possible to make oneself tolerably comfortable while enduring a country life."

## CHAPTER V.



o one amongst those who derived pleasure from the new order of things at Hatherstone Hall, was more happy than Arnold Lee. His friend and schoolfellow, Arthur Hamilton, was visiting within a short distance of the Hall; and although the father of this young gentleman was one of those men whom Mr. Staunton held in the greatest contempt—a feeling which extended almost equally to the son; the two boys found many opportunities of sharing each other's society and amusements, without the knowledge of the "old General," as the owner of Hatherstone Hall was not very respectfully designated by Arnold's friend.

The great cause of Michael Staunton's prejudice directed against this family, was that the father had for many years past preferred a residence abroad. He was, or thought himself, a martyr to ill-health, though all the while, in his personal appearance, representing a very active, energetic, hearty little man of three score years; but whether from an unusual degree of nervous irritability, or from some malady unknown to his friends, he certainly was a sufferer to a most extraordinary extent from change of climate, draughts, ill-cooked dinners, and other personal inconve-

niences, too frequent in their occurrence to be by any possibility enumerated here. For the greater portion of his life, Mr. Hamilton had been in search of what he never yet had found—a place in which none of these inconveniences existed; and while necessity in the present instance was keeping him for a short time a prisoner in England, he began to feel a sort of satisfaction in the overwhelming calamity of his native climate, simply because it was so great as to throw into comparative insignificance all others.

Michael Staunton had no toleration for a free-born English gentleman who could not live at home; and had he ever had the misfortune to sit down to a single meal with Mr. Hamilton, he would have had still less for the fastidiousness, which found, or made, a torment in every flaw that could be discovered in the food itself, or the style in which it was served up. The two men in fact were scarcely calculated for breathing the same atmosphere. Happily for them, they only knew each other by name, and as Mr. Hamilton had no local habitation of his own, but lived almost entirely at hotels, it was not very probable that good or evil chance should ever throw him in the way of the inhabitants of Hatherstone Hall.

The way of life to which Mr. Hamilton had for many years accustomed himself—sometimes loitering through the season at some of the most celebrated baths—sometimes at Naples, sometimes at Madeira, but always located where accommodations and modes of living were the most universally approved, had of necessity shut him out from all possibility of cultivating any very close acquaintance with his only child, a boy about the age of Arnold Lee; who, having been placed at an excellent school by his father, was considered as having experienced all the



parental care which either natural or religious duty required. Had this care been more personal and immediate, it is probable the boy would not have fared better—it might have been considerably worse ; for he was well worked and closely watched ; and, under the regular routine of school discipline, escaped the greatest of all evils to a youthful spirit—the dictation and authority of a capricious temper. Jostled in amongst a large number of other boys, all equally worked and watched, Arthur Hamilton exhibited no traits of character which rendered him remarkable, except that in the half-yearly account of his progress at school, which the head of the establishment was required to transmit to his affectionate parent, he was always reported as a youth of good natural talents, but indolent, procrastinating, and uncertain. Beyond this, no one knew anything about him except Arnold Lee, and Arnold was himself too young and inexperienced to be a very strict judge of character in others.

At the residence of his uncle, a quiet place in the country, Arthur displayed a little more of the natural bent of his tastes and inclinations. There was always a great preparation for breakage and destruction before his half-yearly visits ; servants went murmuring about the house complaining of trouble in anticipation, though upon the whole, not looking particularly displeased ; while extra feeds in the stable, and eager polishing of bit and bridle, announced that the groom anticipated no small addition to the labour usually carried on in his department. It so happened, however, that none of these operatives were ever better pleased than with the actual arrival of the gay young gentleman, who, to use the housekeeper's expression, turned the house upside-down before he had been in it half an hour ; and when, after many scoldings from many

quarters, the time at last came for his return to school, it was always observed, that before Master Hamilton had laughed and shouted his last good-bye, which was uttered most heroically every time, more than one hand was raised to wipe away the starting tear which hindered the last view of the pony galloping down the long avenue at its utmost speed.

It is more than probable that the interest so universally felt in the coming and going of this young gentleman, owed something to the reputation of his being an only child of a father possessed of considerable property. Those who spoke of this property, however, were not always aware of the expenses attending such a mode of living as had, for many years, been adopted by Mr. Hamilton. It is true, that he avoided those which are necessarily incident to the maintenance of an establishment; but while he nestled into his comfortable chair beside the inn fire, repeating as he often did, with extreme satisfaction, these lines of the poet,—

“ Who'er has travelled life's dull round,  
Where'er his varied course has been,  
Will sigh to think, how oft he's found  
His warmest welcome at an Inn; ”

he never took the trouble to place against his comparative comforts, the cost at which they were obtained, nor the many means of usefulness and enjoyment from which they necessarily shut him out.

Perhaps, if the truth were told of Mr. Hamilton, *comparative* comforts were all which he ever enjoyed, or dreamed of enjoying. To find the beds in Paris better than the beds in Florence, the wine at the Albion better than the wine at the Clarence, was all which hope in its most flattering moments, had ever dared to promise this

wanderer through many lands ; and when life to him was looking its loveliest and its best, it was only when he found some of his old resting places in the hands of new masters, who had brought with them better notions than their predecessors of making " things comfortable."

On the arrival of Mr. Hamilton in the busy commercial town which has already been alluded to, he found himself located at an hotel, which an observer, less practised in the art of finding fault, would have supposed capable of supplying every human desire, and that after the most approved method ; but whether the climate of England was already preying upon the nervous temperament of the travelled gentleman, or whether, where everything else was excellent, the bed had been in fault, certain it was, that Mr. Hamilton sat down to his late breakfast with as much predisposition to be dissatisfied as any rational being could well entertain.

This morning, in particular, his distresses had assumed a melancholy character. He spoke in a plaintive pleading tone, as if driven on by accumulated injuries to very near the close of his earthly career ; actually remonstrating with a patient waiter for the over-buttering of a muffin, as if he had said—" and thou, too, Brutus !" And with another waiter not quite so patient, upon the thickness of a slice of broiled-ham, as if he considered *that* " the most unkindest cut of all."

Wholly occupied by these distresses, Mr. Hamilton had actually overlooked the circumstance of a gentleman's card having been sent up to him ; and already, before he had said whether he could receive so early a call or not, the gentleman was bowing in at the door, and looking everything that was cordial, complimentary, and pleasant, with all his might.



Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Lee, so far as the name only went, were soon made known to each other; and the travelled gentleman, who was feeling at the moment a good deal like a bird whose feathers have been stroked the wrong way, having swallowed down, as well as he could, the vexation of being thus surprised by a stranger, became, unconsciously to himself, rapidly smoothed down by the unusually conciliating look and manner of his visitor.

Of course there were a thousand apologies made, or acknowledged to be necessary, on the part of the intruder, who saw at once that everything on the breakfast-table was wrong, and deeply commiserated the situation of any one compelled to partake of such a repast; after which, he spoke touchingly of his parental feelings, and expressed a hope that he might be pardoned for the unprecedented hour at which he had called, on the ground of his impatience to welcome to England the father of a young gentleman to whom his own son was so closely and profoundly attached.

"Humph!" said the gentleman, examining an egg which he had just broken.

Mr. Lee found he was upon a wrong tack, and prudently veered about—"And I was anxious," he continued, "to lose no time in offering my services, to show you all that is going on in this wonderful place. We do things in a spirited way here, sir."

"Now just be kind enough to bring an egg that I *can* eat," said Mr. Hamilton to the waiter, after having risen from his seat to ring the bell with great violence.

"We do things in a spirited way here," persisted Mr. Lee.

"No doubt you do," replied Mr. Hamilton; but at present"—and he laid down his knife and fork with an

air of perfect despondency, as one oppressed beyond his power of endurance—"at present, sir, I have no time, and less inclination to think of these things. You are a father sir, and may know something of my troubles, when I confess to you, that I am perplexed—worn to death—harassed out of my very life—indeed, sir, my digestion suffers, in consequence of not knowing what to do with my boy."

"A difficult question," responded Mr. Lee. "I feel for you sir, with the most entire sympathy, on the ground of your not being a man of business yourself."

"Ah! there's the great difficulty!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, "I find the whole world here gone mad after business. Men who used to live like gentlemen, enjoying their *otium cum dignitate* on their landed property, are now risking their hundreds for the sake of gaining thousands."

"It must be done sir;" said Mr. Lee, "in times like these; more especially with those who have boys to settle in the world."

"I don't understand it, sir;" said Mr. Hamilton. Neither I, nor my family, have ever meddled in these matters. For myself, I should as soon think of turning organ-grinder as speculator. In short, for myself, I want nothing but what I have. I go where I like, see what I like, and make myself at home everywhere.

"Very true, sir, and very pleasant, as you justly observe," responded Mr. Lee, "but a son has claims which cannot easily be set aside."

"The thing is here," exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, striking the table with his clenched hand. "I have just half the money I want, and that's the honest truth."

"By no means a singular case," observed Mr. Lee.

"Do you think not sir? Well, I don't mind speaking

plainly to you, because I know who you are—a man of sense, and a man of business. And I take it very kind of you sir, to make me this early call, because I am really in want of some advice just at this present moment: waiter! Do me the favour to taste this chocolate. Now, *do*, I beseech you. There take it away! Take everything away. People don't often breakfast twice here I should think, eh?"

The patient waiter, without the slightest contraction of brow, or other muscular affection of his countenance, quietly removed every article pertaining to the breakfast, not a whit the more hastily, however, because he was asked if he was asleep, with many pertinent and amiable observations of the same kind; and when at last the performance was over, the fire stirred, the slippers taken away, and the door closed after this unfortunate intruder, the two gentlemen very pleasantly adjusted themselves for a long and confidential conversation.

Mr. Hamilton would have considered this one of the most fortunate moments of his life, only that nothing really fortunate ever *did* happen to him. It was, however, so far favourable in its present aspect, that he was content to accept its flattering auspices as in some sort a repayment for the many ill-cooked dinners he had eaten, and the many uncomfortable beds on which he had vainly endeavoured to sleep. It could not have been said of Mr. Hamilton, that he was, strictly speaking, of a grateful disposition: but he was not malignant; and, setting aside the irritable surface of his character, or treating it like the bitter rind of a wholesome fruit, there was nothing underneath that could offend the taste. Perhaps he had in reality more feeling about his troublesome and expensive boy than he cared to acknowledge, or could have found words for, if he had wished to give utterance to his



thoughts ; or why should he have been so troubled on his behalf ? It is true there was a just cause of anxiety in the discovery he had lately made, that the property which maintained him so handsomely in his favourite mode of living, would not maintain *two* in the same manner : and in all probability it was this important and urgent consideration which had been the cause of his return to England, where he hoped to be able to make satisfactory arrangements for the future settlement of his son. Unacquainted with business himself, and having hitherto considered himself and his family as holding a position equally above its necessities and its vulgar emoluments, he would of course have preferred a profession for the hopeful scion of his house. For this, however, he wanted both the immediate resources and the future interest ; his long residence abroad having deprived him of those associations which might have been most serviceable to his son. Nor was this all. The same mode of life had deprived him of all power of keeping pace with what had been going on in England during his absence ; and he now found himself perfectly bewildered and confused, as if by a vague sense of walking in a dream, amongst the stir and bustle of busy English life, as it is carried on amongst the thousand conflicting interests which compose what is called *society*, amongst the more intelligent portion of the middle classes.

Previous to this visit to his native country, Mr. Hamilton had scarcely understood the character of an English merchant ; and there already began to be something rather more than usually imposing, to his mind, in the wealth and the consequent power which he could not but perceive to be the pride and the distinction of this class of men. In the outskirts of every commercial town he saw their

dwellings and pleasure-grounds, like palaces, adorning the country around; and, within the circle of their more concentrated operations, he saw the noble buildings they had reared, and the institutions they had established, for public benefit and improvement; and he listened with wondering and pleased attention to the information which they themselves were not unwilling to communicate, relating to the great points they had carried, and the revolutions in public affairs and feelings which they had been able to bring about.

Mr. Lee was an able and eloquent descanter upon subjects of this nature; and he had not spent many days in conducting his new friend amongst the public offices and spacious buildings of the town of M—— before he had the satisfaction of hearing his companion observe—"Really, if I had been born to it, I don't think that I should much dislike being a man of business myself. I suppose you do not find it necessary to go amongst these docks and damp places, when the weather is unfavourable?"

"My dear Sir," said Mr. Lee, with the blandest satisfaction, "let me assure you, once for all, that to be eminently successful in commercial affairs, it is as unnecessary to have been brought up to business, as to stand all day amongst these docks."

"Then what am I to do, Sir, if I wish to double my capital by business?"

"Nothing, just nothing, at all; but travel abroad, if you choose, and live twice as comfortably as you have ever done before."

"How so? I cannot understand you. Don't I cast up accounts? But, indeed, I never could do that. Even to look over my bill at the hotel brings on a violent pain over my left eye. No, Sir, I never could do that."

" My dear Sir, how shall I make you fully understand that it is not you, but your money, that does the business for you ? "

" My money, Sir, has never done but one kind of business for me yet ; that is, making itself wings, and flying away. "

" We can teach it a very different lesson here, sir. You have come to the very place in the whole world, where money can be taught to do its master's bidding. "

" You say truly, it is a wonderful place ! and you have set me thinking on this subject, as I never thought before. But don't we hear of failures, sometimes great sums *lost* as well as *won* ? "

" And yet, you see everything goes on prosperously as ever. If such a thing does happen now and then, it ceases to be thought of in a day or two, and all goes on again. "

" But what satisfaction would that be to me, sir, if I was a bankrupt—lodged in a filthy prison, and dying of gaol fever ? "

" Pardon my laughing, sir. The idea is really too comic. Why, you go back in the world's history beyond the memory of man. Nothing of this kind is ever heard of now, I do assure you. "

" Nothing ? "

" I do most solemnly declare to you, nothing ! "

" Have you ever been personally acquainted with any one concerned in such a failure ? "

" Oh ! yes, with many. "

" And what became of them ? "

" Look there, sir. Do you see that Elizabethan mansion ? "

" With its green lawn sloping down to the lodge at the gate ? "



“ Yes that.”

“ Well, who lives there?”

“ A man who failed two years ago, and could not pay three shillings in the pound. These are the prisons we find for our debtors. Nobody minds anything about a failure here.”

“ Sir, I am of a nervous temperament. It is impossible for me to bear a shock of any kind ; I tell you plainly that I could not stand a failure, and if I lost my property, I should lose my life.”

“ I know it sir. I saw on our first interview that you were of a constitution likely to be greatly shaken by any adverse.”——

“ Don’t mention it sir, I beseech you. I am in the horrors, already And see what a cloud is coming over us. The air is becoming quite damp, and chilly. No, no, sir. I must have a glass of white wine negus, and a biscuit. Some people say, ‘ nothing venture, nothing have ;’ but *I* say, nothing venture, nothing lose. That’s my motto sir.”

Mr. Lee bit his lip, and reluctantly turned into the street which led directly to the hotel. He had been nearer this day than ever, arriving at the point which lay so close to his heart—nearer a moment before, and now it seemed as if he was to be thrown back again by the passing of a cloud, to a greater distance than that from which he first set out. His patience began to be well nigh exhausted. He had gone through more trifling, more humouring of idle fancies, more smiling and more trying to be generally agreeable, since the time of his first early call upon Mr. Hamilton, than would have lasted him for twelve months in the ordinary range of his intercourse with society ; and he now felt proportionately annoyed and wearied. He felt too, as if he ought to have some repayment adequate

in remuneration to the labour he had endured. Was this repayment to be allowed to glide from his hand at the very moment when his fingers were beginning to tingle with its touch? No; his resolution rose again; his ingenuity was once more taxed; and, on a brighter and more auspicious morning than the last, he repeated his call at the hotel, so early as to have it understood that he was again at Mr. Hamilton's service, to conduct him wherever he might wish to go, or to show him whatever he might have a curiosity to see.

Fortunately for his purpose, he found the gentleman unusually occupied with letters, and papers of a peculiar nature, which appeared to have been brought him by that morning's post, and which he was evidently reading and re-reading with a good deal of perplexity and uneasiness.

"You find me most unhappily circumstanced," said he, addressing himself to Mr. Lee.

"No bad news, I trust?" observed his visitor, with the most sympathising tone imaginable.

"Bad news enough for me. I find from these accounts, that I must double my son's allowances every year—absolutely double it. It can't be done, sir. The thing is impossible!"

"May I venture to ask in what way the young gentleman's extravagance has shown itself?"

"In the most extraordinary way—a thing altogether unprecedented. Why, my brother writes me—and, by the way, he always makes the best of these things too—he writes me that the boy goes out on his pony for the day together, or he angles in the river—always an excuse for getting out—and that he absolutely puts up at some wayside public-house, and runs me up—look here—look here!

Did you ever see anything to equal that? Bah! such filthy paper! The boy must be *low*, sir—absolutely *low*. I shall lose my senses. I never yet had anything to do with what was *low*. Tailor's bills we all understand. I confess my own is no trifle. And bills at his sadler's I had expected; accounts with his uncle's groom, and a few items of that kind—all such things I had been prepared for; but that my son should resort to these wayside public-houses! Sir, I cannot comprehend the degeneracy of the times we live in!"

"Now, or never," said Mr. Lee to himself; and he looked charged almost to explosion—with an idea so profoundly interesting, that the anxious father found a certain relief in listening to one who could speak with so much power, even though it might not reach his case. To his case however the speech of Mr. Lee was especially directed. With an ingenuity and a plausibility peculiar to himself, he first expatiated upon the dangers of a country life for young gentlemen of Arthur Hamilton's turn of mind, and he went on to suggest, as the only certain preservative against inevitable degradation and ruin, close application in a counting-house, and early initiation into business habits. Although, as he said, the young gentleman might not have yet completed his education, it would have a most wholesome and beneficial effect upon his character, to let him know that his future lot was fixed—unalterably fixed, and that steps were taken towards this final arrangement which it would be quite impossible to recall."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Hamilton, almost peevishly, when his visitor had arrived at this part of his appeal. "You really do distress me. I have thought over all you said to me on a former occasion; and after what I have heard from my brother this morning, I should be ready to



embark in any business that would be likely to double my capital, if I knew the right concern, and the right person to trust myself with."

Occasionally there occurs in society such a thing as a floating compliment upon female beauty, wanting an owner ; and conscious looks may then be seen, which seem to express—"the treasure is mine, if I dared but receive it."

Exactly in this manner looked Mr. Lee, and he looked *the very man* with all his might. But Mr. Hamilton was slow to understand that which had no direct utterance ; and he would have remained in perfect ignorance of the desirable investment for his property, which lucky circumstances had so opportunely placed in his way, had not his diffident and hesitating companion, with much circumlocution, at last explained to him the cherished purpose of his heart, though in such a manner as to make it wear the impress of a very recent thought, suggested by the peculiar circumstances of a stranger—almost a foreigner, situated so disadvantageously as Mr. Hamilton had explained himself to be.

Indeed, it was impossible for any one to be more interested than he had been in Mr. Hamilton's affairs. He had thought of them night and day ; and when at last this plan had suggested itself, he still felt, and felt painfully, that delicacy must forbid his introducing it to one whose mind he knew to be as sensitive on these points as his own. On reconsidering the subject, however, it had begun to wear another aspect ; and nothing should have induced him at last to explain himself as he had done, but the fact, that such arrangements as he proposed, if finally made, would rather work against than for his own boy, as making him in future only a partner where he would otherwise have been sole proprietor.

“ You don’t say so ? ” exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, catching only the sense of the last words, and as perfectly bewildered by all that he had heard as if he had never had a clear idea in all his life.

“ Indeed I do,” replied Mr. Lee. But still the poor gentleman looked sadly bewildered ; and it was not until Mr. Lee had again explained his plan, and again described himself as likely to become a loser by the arrangement, that his anxious auditor repeated, for the last time, with some symptoms of intelligence—“ You don’t say so ? ”

“ Indeed I do,” said Mr. Lee again.

“ Then I say you are a noble, generous-hearted man ! ” exclaimed the traveller, starting from his seat, “ and I put my fortunes in your hand.”

So saying, he grasped that of his visitor in a hearty shake, which it is needless to say was as heartily returned.

## CHAPTER VI.



IN the mean time, the two young gentlemen whose parents had been entering into arrangements so gratifying to both the parties concerned, were enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, in a very different manner. Scouring the country on a spirited pony, which was kept by his kind uncle almost entirely for his use, had ever been a favourite amusement with Arthur Hamilton ; and his friend Arnold, now fired by the same ambition, had so far made interest with the authorities at the hall as to be allowed sometimes to take out, for a few miles only, the old petted pony, which, of all the items of property belonging to Mr. Staunton, the old gentleman appeared most to value.

That this old pony was a great deal too fat, everybody saw ; and having lately shown symptoms of insubordination, under the hand of its master, it was first suggested by Thomas, that the young gentleman, being upon the whole a reasonable sort of youth, should ride it out every day—"say, round the paddock, or even to the nearest post-office—it would spare the groom being sent ;" and thus, after many grave consultations, the matter was adjusted, and Arnold was sent off to the post-office, with strict injunctions to bring the pony home cool. Indeed,



he was so charged, not to ride it fast in the outset, and to walk it the last mile at least, that the journey to the post-office, pleasant as it promised in perspective to be, became a trial of no ordinary description to a spirited boy; and many were the temptations with which he was beset to try the paces of the pony at a different speed.

On one beautiful morning in particular, Arnold had gone dreaming on in the accustomed manner for some time, when the quick ears of the old pony turned sharply, as if cognizant of some unusual sound; and suddenly its slow pace was changed into a strange ambling motion, as Arnold himself became aware of the rapid advance of another horse upon the same road; and before he had time to look around, his friend Arthur Hamilton shot past him at so brisk a trot, that it was some time before a word could be exchanged. At last the latter, having succeeded in checking his pony, turned round with a hearty laugh, and asked Arnold if he was riding to his grandmother's funeral, or if he was carrying dame Margaret's eggs to market. In short, he had so many impertinent things to say, that Arnold, already humbled by the restraint imposed upon him, felt more than usually angry; and, in a spirit of defiance, began to boast of the paces of his grandfather's favourite, as in every respect superior to those of the animal so often and so proudly vaunted by his friend.

"It is excellent at one pace, I know," said Arthur Hamilton, and he threw himself into the position of an old country farmer, and his pony into a jog trot; and thus occupying the middle of the road, went on before Arthur for a considerable distance.

There was no bearing, in a mood already irritated, this absurd mockery. Arnold slackened his rein, and away

went old Peggy nothing loth, nor distanced, as might have been expected, by the accelerated speed of her rival. Away went both riders to their hearts' content—away went trees, and gates, and hedges, cottages, and gardens—post-office and everything else forgotten in that desperate conflict; for Arnold, once having broken his faith and violated his trust, would have died rather than have been defeated in the race. Never, perhaps, in her whole life had old Peggy such a run. For a long time she was as willing in the race as her desperate rider; but as her breathing failed, she needed all the stimulus of lash and bridle; and lustily did Arnold lay about her with his whip, striping her foaming sides, until his laughing and light-hearted companion began to think the affair too serious for a joke, and with that he willingly gave up. A race, either won or lost, was a matter of comparatively small moment to him: to Arnold it was a thing of life or death.

Arthur Hamilton knew very little of the nature or the feelings he was sporting with, when he provoked his friend to that mad conflict; and he was really shocked to see the countenance of Arnold as he threw himself from the tired pony, and, stroking its heaving sides, exclaimed in a strange, hollow voice—"There—it's all over with me. I may as well go and hang myself now."

"Nonsense, my good fellow," said Arthur dismounting, and applying his hand also in the most soothing manner to the panting animal. "Let me see," he continued, looking round—"Oh! I know where we are now. Half a mile will bring us to a place I know very well. There is excellent stabling there, and the groom knows me. We'll give the old lady a mash, and rub her down, and she'll take you home as fresh as a lark."

Arnold shook his head. All that might be very well

for the horse. Indeed, it was the only thing that could be done now ; but how was he to face the family at the Hall ? or how, beyond this, was he ever to be reconciled to himself ? The severest punishment which human ingenuity could inflict, would have been less agonising to him than his own self-condemnation—his own self-contempt ; and especially, when he thought of what his mother would feel for him, and with him, his state of mind became that of one bordering upon distraction.

Arthur Hamilton could not understand this. He saw nothing in what his friend had done so very culpable—nothing but what he would have done himself, again and again, without fearing any particular consequences. The pony would be no worse. His friend would reach home in the course of two hours, at latest. He would only have to say that he had met with a friend.

“ Don’t talk to me ! ” exclaimed Arnold, impatiently. “ I know what I have done, and how, and all about it. If I had taken the pony without leave, it would have been different ; but they trusted me—they all trusted me. And the poor old thing—look here ! ” and he pointed to the marks upon the animal’s sides, while his lips quivered with emotion at the thought of the wanton cruelty he had inflicted.

“ I’ll go home with you,” said Arthur, in his kindest manner. “ I’ll face the old gentleman myself, and tell him it was all my doing—which, you know, is nothing but the truth.”

“ Arthur,” said Arnold, looking more proudly in his despair than he had ever done before, “ you do not—you cannot understand me. If you think I am *afraid*, you are very much mistaken. Look you ; I will go directly up to Mr. Staunton myself, and tell him all about



it. I'll tell him what a fool—what a brute I have been ; and if he knocks me down, I'll rise up and tell him the same thing over again. Don't think, for a moment, that I'm afraid of him, or of any man, though I thank you very much for offering to go with me."

" You look as if you did," said Arthur, laughing ; and still wholly at a loss to understand his friend. " I will go with you, however ; for whatever storm bursts over you, I deserve it more than you do."

" You are very good, and generous ;" said Arnold— " more so a thousand times than I deserve ; but, on second thoughts, I feel sure it would be better for me to return alone."

" As you like," said Arthur ; " but I cannot see why it should be so."

At last, however, it was settled as Arnold had advised, that he should return alone, and tell his own tale. He knew, what was not so well known to his friend, that nothing could render the act less unpardonable in the opinion of his grandfather, than the fact of his having been led on by the companionship of Arthur Hamilton ; and Arnold, too, had no wish that his friend should witness those expressions of anger and contempt which he knew, too well, that his own confessions would call forth. The two companions parted therefore, at a late hour in the day, at a point where two roads diverging led to their different destinations ; and Arnold, now left to the uninterrupted current of his own thoughts, rode slowly on, impressed with nothing so much, as a feeling that he was an older, but by no means a better man, than when he had traced that peaceful road a few hours earlier in the day.

Great excitement, it may naturally be supposed, had prevailed throughout the Hall in consequence of Arnold

not returning at the accustomed time. Some feared for the pony, some for the rider, and some for both. The mystery grew more and more incomprehensible every moment; and those alone who know what belongs to such quiet country life, can understand the depth of such mysteries, and the endless calculation and excitement which they occasion.

Arnold wished for nothing so much as to be able to put his horse up in the stable, and walk directly into the presence of his grandfather without seeing any other human being; and in this he was so far fortunate, that many of the members of the household were gone in different directions in search of the lost messenger, while he had approached the house by an unusual and comparatively unfrequented way.

What took place in the old oak parlour, where Arnold walked straight into the presence of his grandfather, and told him the whole story, without hesitation or concealment, the narrator of these simple family incidents declines to say. It is sufficient to state, that loud and angry words were long heard issuing out of the half-closed door at which both Margaret and Mrs. Lee had more than once attempted to enter without daring to do so. Beyond this, however, it must be added, that, as is not unfrequently the case with such natures brought into such contact, the impression on the old man's mind remained, that the straight-forward honesty of the boy in daring at once to tell him all, was an utter want of proper compunction on his part—nay, even a vain-glorying in what he had done, and a determination to set at defiance all natural and rightful authority.

With this impression not to be shaken from his mind, Michael Staunton found no difficulty in making it under-

stood, that the removal of his grandson from his presence was an event essential to the restoration of peace and comfort in his household ; and Mrs. Lee, who was quick to understand every turn and temper of her father's mind, prepared for her departure with a silent alacrity, admirably calculated for the avoidance of all painful or unpleasant remarks. In forwarding this purpose, other circumstances also afforded considerable aid. A letter from Mr. Lee to his wife was waiting at the post when Arnold and his friend flew past ; and by way of placing a good against an evil, which was always the practice with this grateful-spirited woman, so far as she was able to do so, she hailed, in the present instance, the announcement that she was released from the obligation of petitioning her father for a loan of money, as at least something to weigh in the balance against the bitter vexation which her boy had awakened.

Indeed, not all the anger of Mr. Staunton, nor the conviction of its being justly merited—not all the dread of returning home with the tidings that Arnold had fallen into lasting and unpardonable disgrace with his grandfather, were half so terrible and repugnant to the mind of Mary, as the idea of soliciting that aid which she would almost rather have died than ask for at her father's hand. From this necessity she was now released—but how ? She was recalled home at her husband's urgent request, to be there on a certain approaching day, and for what ?

At first Mary did not understand the drift of her husband's letter, more especially as it was so much kinder than usual. It was very natural, intimate as the two boys were, that Mr. Lee should ask the father of Arthur Hamilton to dine with him, and that he should wish his wife and family to be present on the occasion ; but what this



had to do with the cessation of anxieties of a pecuniary nature—with the future prospects of the firm of Lee and Co.—with the settlement of one of the boys, if not of both,—with the purchase of a new dinner service, at which the letter hinted—with the most perfect arrangement of this dinner, which was not to be too splendid, but the *exact thing*, and with many other items slightly touched upon. Mary was for some time quite too dull to comprehend. Perhaps she was too busy packing, and rejoicing in her escape from the dreadful necessity of having to ask her father for money—perhaps she was too much occupied in thanking the good Margaret for all her kindness, and in sympathizing with the widow, who wept tears of real grief at the prospect of her departure. At all events, it was not until late at night, when, retiring silently from the bedside of the widow, she stole gently into her own room, and after stooping down to kiss her sleeping children, sat down upon one of the old-fashioned window seats, and, opening the casement, looked out into the silent night—it was not until she had looked thoughtfully and long that the whole truth flashed upon her mind; and, clasping her hands together, she glanced upwards to the moon as if there were real help in that pale comforter.

Not that Mary felt *certain* about anything connected with her husband's affairs. He might, for anything she actually knew, be a prosperous and an honourable man. But then, such dreadful apprehensions had lately crowded so thickly upon her mind; such mysterious hints had been occasionally dropped; and altogether, the atmosphere of her home had become so heavy with the symptoms of a gathering storm, that the greatest positive calamity could scarcely have been more destructive to her peace, than the fears which lurked beneath her outward calm.

Was it possible, Mary asked herself, that the father of Arthur Hamilton was about to be made a victim of, to serve her husband's purposes? And was she herself, under the show of hospitality, to be made a party to these transactions? And then she thought of her own son similarly circumstanced, and of a mother—a professedly Christian mother—helping to draw him into a vortex that might finally swallow up the whole of his earthly hopes. And all this, too, under the colour of friendship! “Ah!” said Mary, as she looked out upon the grassy lawn, and the thick hedges, and the distant cottages, “that we had the meanest shed upon my father's property, in which we might live at peace with all the world!” And then she thought of the strange, incomprehensible nature of the man with whom she had bound herself for evil and for good; and so she lost herself, as was her wont; for nothing she could do or think had ever made this sad page of her history more intelligible to her.

The following day was one of extreme dullness at the Hall. The widow kept her room; for when the little party was gone, she had no longer a kind and sympathizing listener to whom she could condescend to complain: and little Kate, falling back to a greater distance than ever from her grandfather, went roaming about the garden by herself: while Margaret was more than usually busy with her household affairs; for the going away of visitors is not unfrequently attended with as much bustle as their arrival.

An atmosphere of total obscurity, however, was one in which Mrs. Philip Staunton could not breathe long. Her silent chamber became intolerably wearisome to her; and, as she now entertained a pleasing hope of callers every morning, there was just sufficient inducement for her to be







up and dressed at the only interesting time of the whole day to her.

It was very sad to the good Margaret to see one whose course she believed to be verging towards eternity, thus making a misery of the short remaining portion of her life; and so intense was the pity with which this kind-hearted woman regarded such a state, that she doubled her assiduity in devising plans of comfort and convenience; for, alas! that was all which the widow permitted her to do; until at last, a succession of the most delicate and unwearied attentions so far gained upon the invalid, that she began, at times, to detain Margaret longer in her room; and even condescended so far, as to speak of her own misfortunes, and to weep over them as Margaret stood by.

From the first time that she did this, a sort of secret sympathy or bond was established between these two women; for tears, actual tears, were in themselves an irresistible appeal to Margaret's heart. It is true that she herself shed very few; but at the sight of real grief in others, her voice always fell into soft sad tones, which, while she said nothing that was very decidedly to the point, found their way directly to the heart of the sufferer; and conveyed, without expressing it, a strong conviction that she herself had suffered too.

Having once condescended to drink at the well-spring of Margaret's sympathy, Isabel Staunton found it so consoling, that she made large demands upon the supply, though never too large for the gentle heart to which she appealed; and while the actual words which Margaret spoke were often strangely simple, and inappropriate to the morbid sorrows which she had to soothe, the voice—the soft low voice—was in itself so tender and so musical, that no human heart could long have remained insensible

to its power. Thus, by degrees, the lonely widow came almost to love the gentle placid creature who was always ready to obey the slightest intimation of her wishes ; and Margaret, with a true woman's spirit, loved the widow because she was so helpless and dependent, and so constantly in need of her assistance.

" If she would but let me read the Bible to her, to comfort her poor heart," said Margaret to herself ; but that was too much ; or Margaret's other book—her *light* reading ; for she, too, had her page of recreation and amusement ; and often did little Kate detect a dimpling smile about her lips, as she sat, in pleasant sunny hours, intent upon the history of her favourite Pilgrim, with all his strange adventures—and still more strange companions, by the way. This, then, was Margaret's *light* reading—her book of pastime ; and she knew no other. Little Kate dipped into the old volume, and thought it wondrous pleasant reading ; but having spoken of it to her mother, she was told the style was obsolete and vulgar, and that her taste would never be a pure taste, if she read such books.

" I like it, though," said little Kate, with such a knowing, earnest look, that none who saw her could have doubted but the child would look into the book again. Indeed, she was a very natural, as well as a very determined little portion of humanity, notwithstanding all her artificial training ; and, in spite of all a mother's partiality, Mrs. Staunton often feared her daughter would grow up deficient in those ladylike accomplishments and graces which she herself esteemed so highly. To this subject some of her most anxious thoughts were turned ; and, in her own real estimate of things, it would perhaps have been difficult to decide which was the most important idea



presented to her mind—death for herself; or a boarding-school, at which her child might be taught the habits and the general bearing of a gentlewoman.

“If I could but go to Brighton myself,” was the exclamation of Mrs. Staunton one day, in her complaints to Margaret; “I know a lady so celebrated for the finish she gives to all her pupils.”

“Her what?” inquired Margaret, very softly.

“Her finish,” repeated the lady.

“Ah! my dear Madam,” said Margaret, “we are all finished in God’s own time and way.”

The widow sunk back into the downy cushions which had been placed for her support. It was of no use endeavouring to make herself understood. “You know nothing,” said she, impatiently; “and therefore, it is impossible you should feel for a person in my situation. It is my misfortune that I am always amongst people who don’t know what it is to have a single grief.”

“I should think most of us have *one* grief,” said Margaret, “even if we have no more; and sometimes one grief falls as heavily as a great many.”

“What makes you sigh so deeply?” said the lady, almost laughing at the idea of her humble companion talking about grief, as if she had never known what it was.—“What makes you sigh so?” she repeated; “people in your situation know nothing about real grief.”

“We do sometimes, though,” said Margaret; and a deep crimson blush rose and spread slowly over her face, while her down-cast eyes flashed out beneath the long dark lashes which usually made them look so soft.

The widow, who gazed earnestly at her, as she would have gazed at any curious spectacle, grew really interested; and in one of those strange moments, when an habitually

guarded tongue becomes suddenly loosened, and a heart is thrown open which the speaker afterwards wishes had rather been locked with other secrets into the deep grave—in one of those strange moments, the gentle, unobtrusive Margaret, so unaccustomed to speak about herself, entered at once upon the history of one who had been situated, she said, a good deal like herself,—one with whom she was intimately acquainted in early life, and therefore she could testify, from her own knowledge, that the poor have real sorrows at well as the rich.

“She was a fisherman’s daughter,” said Margaret. “Her parent’s lived in a small cottage on the banks of a wide river, and gained their bread with a good deal of difficulty. Indeed, sometimes things went very hardly with them, and they were fain to send their daughter out to service early.”

“Was she a pretty girl, that same daughter?” asked the widow, yawning; “for I don’t think I shall care much about your story unless she was.”

“People said so,” replied Margaret, very meekly. “She was very fair, and not much like a working girl to look at. But she did work, and hard too, and cheerfully. She had a merry laugh then, and was fonder than she ought to have been of dancing, and other follies of that kind. She went out, however, as I said before, to service; and fond as she was of play, I never heard that she neglected work.”

“Come, come,” said the widow; “you don’t get on. I suppose your heroine had a lover?”

“She was not a heroine, Ma’am, but quite a poor simple girl; and she had, as you say, a lover. She might have had more than one, if such had been her wish; but she never cared—no, not from her fifteenth year, except for one, and he was a sailor,—a very handsome sailor, Ma’am.”

“What, with tarry hands? I don’t think I *can* listen, Margaret, only that you have such a soft sweet voice. It really soothes me to sleep; so pray go on, for I am very weary.”

“Well, ma’am, as I said, she loved one man alone, who used to come and go; and always when he was about returning, she used to ask leave to go out and visit her father and mother if she could, to watch the ship sail up the river. It was a glorious sight, ma’am; and the only disgrace she ever got into was from lingering too long when he was expected home and did not come. At last the time was fixed for them to marry. He was to be promoted after that voyage, and he wrote to her from a great way off, full of hope and joy, for he had done a great service to his captain and was more sure than ever of promotion. That time, above all others, she must be at home to welcome him. He even fixed upon a signal for her, to be hoisted half way up the mast. It was a yellow shawl, one he had bought for her at New York. If he was alive and well she would be sure to see the yellow shawl—nothing in life could be more certain.

“Well, the time came. The fisherman knew exactly all about it, and he let his daughter know; and she was there; and they stood upon the shore of that great river, then so calm and bright; for not a breath of wind was blowing. It was a soft still summer’s day, and the father and the girl were out upon the water’s side from early morning light, looking all out upon the broad sea, where many ships were sailing, and at last *it* came. The old man knew it such a long way off! It came with all its sails spread, looking so gloriously—like a great spirit walking on the still waters. And then the mother joined them, and all three stood watching; but the mother said the ship looked dark and



heavy, somehow ; and the girl was angry with her for that saying. Still the ship came nearer, for the tide had now set in, and on she came—so near that every eye was looking for the shawl—the yellow shawl, none doubting it was there. Oh ! how they looked ! and unconsciously their voices dropped, so that there was total silence when the ship came sweeping on. It passed, and there was no signal ; and the mother, to whom she had so lately spoken sharply, turned round and clasped her daughter in her arms, and held her there until the father looked again—again—again, through the bright light of the sunset, into which the vessel seemed to pass away—away ; and all was dark for evermore to that poor girl.”

“ But how was it ? ” asked the widow, who had really been beguiled into listening. “ I suppose the sailor was false—they generally are.”

“ Oh, ma’am ! it was not him that was in fault. You may be sure the father of the girl went up and asked the captain everything. It was a sad history that he heard. The sailor had gone overboard one dark and stormy night—nobody knew how, for all had been confusion—a sudden squall, or something terrible had come on, and he was never missed until it was too late to save him.”

“ And so the poor girl wept herself to death ? ” said Mrs. Staunton.

“ No, ma’am,” said Margaret, “ she did not die. She went back to service, and worked very hard.”

“ The best thing she could do,” observed the widow.

“ Yes, ma’am, no doubt of that,” said Margaret. “ It was her duty to work hard. She was born to it, and as her father’s health began to fail, you know she could not choose but work ; and she was fortunate in one thing : she







had an excellent place, and good wages, and always conducted herself creditably."

"That proves exactly what I said," observed the widow, "that people in your situation do not really know what grief is, or they could not work. The very fact that they do work, shows that they do not feel."

"I don't think," said Margaret, "that the little chamber where that poor girl slept, if it could speak, would say that she did not feel. But my story is not done yet."

"What! did her lover come to life again?" inquired the lady.

"Oh! ma'am, the grave has many secrets, and the great deep sea—but to return to this poor girl. She was weak ma'am, very weak; weak in every way—weak in her sorrow, and weak also in her power to resist temptation. It came upon her in a way she never expected—quite suddenly, and she was very poor, and very lonely."

"Oh, Margaret! I am afraid your friend was a worthless creature after all," said the widow.

"No, ma'am; no," said Margaret, almost proudly. "Nobody, that I know of, ever had to blush for her in that way. But, as I said before, she was very poor, and very lonely; and in the course of time her father died, and then her mother came to want; and then a great temptation came upon her—wealth, Ma'am, and a friend—a kind protector, who had never breathed a word into her ear that could have made an angel blush; and then such a home was offered to her—oh! Madam, I often wonder now if she did really wrong in ——"

"In what, Margaret?"

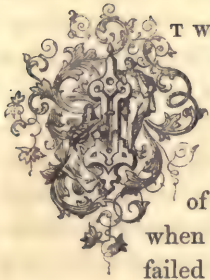
"In marrying, Ma'am."

"Most certainly not. What makes you think she did?"

"Because she had so hard a punishment, and has it

yet. There is an old song, Ma'am ; the servants sung it on her wedding-day ; she feels sometimes as if the words of that old song had burned into her heart : for she had not long been a bride, when, sitting one day by herself, in a still parlour, she looked up, and *he* was there before her—his actual living, breathing form ! He did not know that she was married ; and he told her all about his accident ; how he had fallen from the ship in that great storm, and how his life had been saved by miracle, for her sake, he believed ; and how he had worked back his way, so poor and friendless—how he had written to her, but supposed his letters must have missed. And all the while he looked confused and strange ; and she, no doubt, looked worse. Had the ground opened to receive her, it would have been a welcome sight to her, just then. But neither earth nor air could help her ; speak she must, and speak she did. Every moment she kept silence seemed an hour of guilt : and so she told him all. Weak, trembling, miserable creature, that she was, he *might* have *pitied* her, for she was very wretched ; but he did not. He was a generous but a fiery-tempered man ; and such fierce wrath he poured upon her—such wild, and horrible, and guilty things he uttered, that she often hears them still—hears them when the wind is loud, and when the ocean-waves roll up against the shore ; in the dark nights of winter, when the ships go down, and perishing seamen struggle in the booming waves ; she hears them then, and always ; for those cruel words come back at all times, and the thought comes with them, that *so he left her*—unconvinced, and unforgiving !”

## CHAPTER VII.



It was seldom that the kind-hearted mistress of Hatherstone Hall found herself brought into close contact with any one without endeavouring to do them good, in one way or another. In her powers of conversation she had no confidence; and when her bible and her book of light reading failed in this object, she still persisted in exercising her benevolent emotions, through the kindest and most persevering personal attentions; considering, not unwisely, that, by making the body comfortable, she should be keeping open a readier access to the mind. Nor had she reason to regret the adoption of this plan, in the case of the afflicted widow, who had been brought by calamitous circumstances within the little circle of her influence. Although so entirely opposite in themselves, these two characters were now placed in close and constant intercourse; and so easily was Margaret moved to the extreme of anxious solicitude, that Mrs. Staunton found a secret pleasure, not only in speaking freely and fully of all those symptoms of a dangerous malady now stealing rapidly upon her, but even in wantonly accelerating their approach, by frequently doing the very things which Margaret knew and felt to be the most unsuitable to one in her state of



health. Thus the good intentions of the kind nurse, and care-taker, were sadly frustrated; for Margaret having worked upon the feelings of the lady, so as to excite some interest in the surrounding poor, she had the mortification of finding Mrs. Staunton perpetually attempting to go out in the most unfavourable state of the atmosphere; and, unknown to her, frequently taking the opportunity, when the ground was damp, or the weather showery, to walk in her thinnest shoes, and to time her visits to the cottages, so as to fall in with a thorough drenching from the rain.

The fact was, Mrs. Philip Staunton was getting up a sort of popularity; and, shut out from every other kind of distinction, she found a certain gratification in this. Not, however, to be too severe upon her motives, it is more than probable, that, at the same time, her sad heart was solaced, and really benefited, by the new and wholesome channel which her sympathies had found. She was not a woman of that hard and unfeeling nature which could remain unmoved by the spectacles of poverty and patient suffering which these features of human life, for the first time, presented to her view; and the idea of doing good to others, more pitiable than herself,—an idea which Margaret had been so solicitous to impress upon her mind,—brought with it a degree of pleasurable excitement, not the less agreeable for having been in a great measure unfelt before. Thus, as in most of the actions of human life, there was a mixture of motives in what she did—feelings truly kind, for the good and the trusting to discern, and make the most of; feelings of vanity and gratified self-love, for the less trusting to cavil at.

Nor was it difficult for the widow to make her visits welcome in the cottages of the poor. Her very dress and appearance took with them a strong recommendation;

and when their many wants found a ready supply from Margaret's well-stored household, the graceful visitant was hailed as if she had been herself the sole dispenser of such benefits, and her own benevolence the only source from whence they flowed. It was so affecting, too, to hear this graceful, delicate, and, above all, *well-dressed* lady alluding so touchingly to her own sorrows—it was such an honour to attend her home, “so sad to hear her cough;” and the women shook their heads, and looked significantly at one another, as she walked with tottering steps away; and whispers got abroad about *neglect*, and why she was allowed to go about so much alone—“on foot, too, with a carriage in the coach-house at the hall!” And even in her presence these whispers grew at last; and Isabel heard them too, and sighed, and shook her head, and smiled so faintly, and did not contradict them; but would sometimes persist in setting out on her return, just as a shower was coming on; and when remonstrated with, would look expressively, and say she “dared not—really *dared* not stay until the rain should cease.”

It is strange how eagerly the poor, and women in particular, catch hold of, and revel in, such notions as the widow's habits, look, and manner were calculated to suggest. It is strange that their pity should so often choose a channel for its exercise, through which it cannot flow without injury to somebody, and often the least blameable of all the parties concerned. Yet, strange as this may be, it is still more so, that any mind should find its food, its luxury, in pity of this kind—should bear to be the subject of it, under false surmises, and not burn to render justice—full and overflowing justice—to those who thus suffer under a kind of suspicion from which they never can defend themselves.

We hear much talk about the injuries inflicted on individuals and society by the exercise of a malignant spirit; and books are written, and scenes got up, to exhibit the workings of this spirit in its most powerful and revolting operations; but if all the injuries could be brought to light which are inflicted indirectly by the workings of mere littlemindedness, which knows no motive beyond what flows from, and to, that centre of all feeling—self,—if these could be traced out amongst the tangled web of human impulses, and thus laid bare in all their poisonous and corrupting influences, how far would they exceed the widest sum of evils ever yet produced by absolute malignant feeling!

It is a comparatively rare thing for any human being to say deliberately of another, “I will poison his joy—I will turn his good to evil—I will destroy his safety or his peace.” Feelings of a directly injurious nature are for the most part passions, impetuous and often murderous in their operation;—mad—brutal—as transient as they are extreme. But for a human being to say to himself, “I like this; it makes me feel myself what I wish to be—distinguished, important, admired, or beloved; I will have more of this; it is the food adapted to my constitution—the aliment I love; it does me good; it makes my heart feel warm, my head capable, and my arm strong. I can look up, and about me, now; and whatever lifts me thus above my fellows, is, and shall be, my delight for ever;”—for an individual to say this, is but to utter that common language of the human heart, which touches the mainspring of all human conduct.

It was very evident that the widow, Mrs. Staunton, thought her right was the enjoyment of a sort of universal consideration. It might vary, with circumstances, from



the extreme of distant homage, to that of personal flattery and attention; but it was acceptable under every form—and, in short, she felt that it was the very thing to do her good. Under the influence of this sustaining aliment, she grew more cheerful, more communicative, and altogether more amiable: strong proof that it was doing her constitution good. Alas! poor woman, and her pulse was growing quicker every day, her step more feeble, and her cough!—the cottage people shook their heads to hear it, and Margaret even wept beside her, for she could not, with all her household nostrums, find a remedy so potent as to still its violence; especially after cold, damp, evening walks, extended to so great a distance, that sometimes the poor sufferer had to be led home, supported by her humble friends, who, not unfrequently, beguiled the way by hints, both bitter and reproachful, about the “carriage in the coach-house never used;” on which occasions the widow always smiled her sweetest smile, and said she should be sorry, indeed, to trouble any one to bring out a carriage for her use, although, most probably, she should not “want it long.”

It was towards the close of the year, when the evenings were beginning to be damp and chilly, though the country was still beautiful, that the widow bethought herself how pleasant it would be to have a dance of the peasant children on the lawn. In vain did Margaret remonstrate against the danger of being beguiled by such an amusement, to risk too much exposure to the autumnal air. Her arguments were treated with contempt; and the pleasant scheme, so fraught with picturesque effect, became a favourite topic for some days between the mother and her child. It was impossible but that Kate should be delighted with a plan so rich in promise; only one difficulty pre-

sented itself was she herself to dance, or only to be a looker-on?

For the prosecution of this scheme, everything seemed propitious. Mr. Staunton went from home, taking his servant Thomas with him; and then the larder, the store-room, and the dairy were, indeed, in requisition, and contributed their abundant stores, without a moment's question on the widow's part, whether she had a right to draw thus largely upon another person's property. It is probable she had but one thought connected with the subject, and that a very pleasant one. She knew that she herself would be regarded as the dispenser of all this bounty; and the absence of the master of the mansion was a circumstance highly favourable to the confirmation of this idea. As for poor Margaret, she was thought of only as the instrument—the cook, the contriver, but nothing more. And yet Margaret, with her strict and conscientious ordering of all these household matters, would be sorely put to it for weeks to come, so to make up her regular accounts, as to turn away the anger of her lord from one whom she pitied too much to attempt to disappoint or contradict.

“If only the cold can be kept from striking to her feet,” thought Margaret, a thousand times more earnest to preserve the form of the delicate sufferer from injury, than to escape the most dreaded consequences to herself; and, wholly occupied in anxieties of this description, she gave herself, head, heart, and hand, to all necessary preparations for the evening's entertainment, as unsparingly as if it had been a plan attended with her highest approval.

Besides the efficient hand of Margaret, there were many others busily at work; and little helping agents might be seen, passing to and fro to field and garden; some with aprons full of autumn flowers and evergreens; and some,

in groups more idly busy, underneath the neighbouring hedges, weaving garlands for their sunburnt brows ; for all had learned, by this time, to understand a little of the lady's taste for beauty, as well as for enjoyment ; and looking up to her as to some exalted being elevated to an almost immeasurable height above themselves, they were studious to render the occasion in every respect one that should be worthy of her favour and her presence.

In the midst of these preparations, it was impossible for the widow to look with perfect complacency upon her own child. She would have liked to see her a sylph-like figure, passing to and fro, as widely separated from the vulgar herd as if descended from a different sphere ; and there, alas ! was little Kate, as sunburnt and as common-looking as the veriest gleaner in the parish, excepting only for that peculiar look of her's, which might be something striking yet, though never in the way her mother wished, and once had fondly dared to hope. Perhaps it was, that Kate had now attained that most unsightly of all ages—the period from infancy to womanhood. Certain it was, that she was growing lean and lanky ; and that the deepening of her complexion, almost to the colour of her hair and eyes, had rendered her altogether a sort of homely grey, not unlike the hemp which she had seen Margaret's mother spinning, in the cottage by the river side. It seemed, almost, as if the child's character and position altogether partook of the same middle tint, or questionable grey ; and that a natural doubt about what class, or party, or place in the creation she properly belonged to, was beginning to create an awkwardness and shyness in the child, until this time foreign to her nature. Indeed, ever since the sunshine of her grandfather's countenance had been entirely withdrawn from her, she had been a different creature, always afraid



of intruding or offending ; and amidst the secrets of her own little wondering mind, extremely doubtful whether she should ever be allowed permanently to fill a place in that old hall. Strange, fearful thoughts, too, about her mother's illness came across her now and then, chiefly introduced by Margaret's kind and sympathising talk to her ; and while she never asked of any one whether it was really so, nor alluded to the subject ever so remotely herself, she leaned more frequently in silence against her mother's knee, and looked so earnestly into her face at times, that Margaret could not bear it ; but would call the child away, to go with her amongst the fields and flowers, where she was sure to be diverted, in a moment, from her anxious thoughts.

It was perfectly natural that, on the evening of the dance, little Kate should be a stranger to all apprehensions of an anxious or gloomy nature. Indeed, the appearance of her mother might have deceived an eye more practised than her own. Pleased with the preparations, and elated, as every heart must be, at the contemplation of childhood's innocent enjoyment, the widow had, perhaps, never looked more animated, or been more happy, since her arrival at the hall, than when she took her place in the centre of the little throng, in a well-protected seat, which had been prepared with the utmost care for her accommodation. It is always good to look upon enjoyment, and it was an easy thing to look with smiles on those who smiled so heartily in return. That the eye of Mrs. Staunton was brighter than usual on this occasion, and that her cheeks were deeply flushed, each with its round spot of crimson, many persons had subsequently to remark ; though no one probably imagined at the time, that these unusual symptoms of excitement had any further meaning, than what arose naturally out of that picturesque and gratifying scene.





*A merry dance at night, after  
the hour had come*



And a merry dance it was upon the lawn that evening, while an old blind fiddler played beneath a tree, as happy as the rest, in the blithe sounds that reached his ear. Even Margaret, whose heart had been so full of fearful apprehension, forgot them all for a brief interval of happiness; and little Kate, after being crowned with a garland which the children had made for her, and creeping, underneath her blushing burden, shyly and awkwardly, beside her mother, as if not knowing what to do, at last ran in amongst the circle, and, grasping in her own the first little hot hand that was held out to her, danced round and round as gaily as the rest, untroubled by a single thought about her own distinction from the vulgar herd.

It was no small incitement to the hilarity of the dancers, to see, spread out before them, upon tables groaning with their weight, the most abundant provision of autumn fruits, and other preparations hitherto unknown to their eager taste; and when the time for this stage of indulgence came, the scene became, if possible, more busy and more animating than before. The assistance of Margaret was urgently demanded here; and with her accustomed wise management, she had her appointed agents ready for the distribution of the fruit and other luxuries, so that no disorder or confusion might destroy the harmony and enjoyment of the evening. After a short absence from her post of duty by the lady's seat, to which she returned with hasty steps, as soon as all things were in a proper train, she was surprised, however, to see the lately erect and animated figure of the widow in a drooping attitude; and to hear the faint, but earnest and imploring whisper—"Lead me away,"—which struck upon her ear like the first tone of a death bell.

It need not be told with what assiduity Margaret applied

herself to remove the poor sufferer from her dangerous position, out in the cold air, while the dews of evening were already gathering around ; and as she first supported, and then actually bore her into the house in her own arms, she felt but too plainly that strong shiverings were running, like ague-chills, through the entire frame of her, who had so lately looked as if suddenly restored both to happiness and health.

In a few moments a gentle hushing sound was heard amongst the merry throng ; and no sooner was the cause surmised, than a general quietness prevailed, each intent upon obeying the command to disperse and return to their different homes, without delay, and without the least disturbance.

The mild and unobtrusive influence of Margaret had so far spread amongst other members of her household, that all this was conducted with the greatest order, under the management of her inferior agents ; nor was the departure of the children less peaceful, or less willing, because, with Margaret's own habitual consideration, each was sent off with her full portion of the good things provided for the evening's entertainment.

Beyond this outward evidence of some great shock having occurred, or some great event having transpired, which each of the little visitants at the Hall interpreted according to her own impressions, to the wondering circle within in her own home, we will not attempt to describe the many circumstances which combined to render that approaching night one of the most awful in remembrance, which Margaret ever had experienced. We will scarcely even look into the shrouded chamber of that Hall, where silent steps went in and out ; and messengers, sent swiftly forth, came back and brought no hope ; and Margaret

stood alone. With all her kindness and her care—her nostrums and appliances—she stood alone, weak as the veriest reed, and altogether powerless; save that she ventured once or twice to speak in simple language of a Saviour never sought too late; and then the low tones of her gentle voice were clear and musical, as if an angel spoke.

But no one knew, nor did any of the awe-struck attendants in that chamber ever venture to surmise, whether those holy words had fallen on a heart or ear capable of understanding them. Some said a hand was raised—a delicate white hand; some said an earnest and imploring look went up to Heaven; some said there was a calm and sweet expression on the countenance, which none had seen before. All were most willing to believe what most they wished. And kindly thus they drew the curtains round the bed where all was still, and so departed.

Long, long, did Margaret sit there, all alone, communing with her own heart and her God; wondering sometimes how those who had no God, no Saviour, and no bible, could endure to witness scenes like that which she had witnessed there: and yet not in her heart condemning any; but pitying and praying for them, as perhaps she had never prayed before. And then she took her bible on her knee, and sought for comfort in its well-read pages; until exhausted nature closed her solemn vigil, and she, too, silently withdrew, with steps as soft and slow as if the slightest sound or hurried movement might disturb the slumbers of that form which lay so peacefully extended on the bed.

The next morning there was deep silence in and round about that ancient hall. In the grey twilight might be seen a slightly opened casement, against which a blind



drawn down flapped gently to and fro ; and in that room a feeble light was burning, long after the labourer had gone forth with rustling tread across the stubble fields, and the robin had begun to sing its autumn song amongst the yellow leaves. Tapping against the window frame, almost at regular intervals, still swung that heavy blind, until at last the shadow of a softly-moving figure might be seen, and then the yellow light within was quenched, and all was still again.

How strange it seemed, that nothing had been moved or shaken round the walls of that old hall ; not a small pane shattered in the ancient windows, not the deep red berries of the pyracanthus torn away ; nor yawning earth had opened, nor deep thunder rolled—no, not so much as the small robin had been frightened from the spray ; and yet a great event had been transacted there. A conflict, a deep struggle between life and death had taken place within that silent chamber ; and death had conquered life, or life had conquered death—which was it ?

## CHAPTER VIII.



THE solemn event to which allusion has been made in the last chapter was soon known amongst the circle of Mr. Staunton's family, throughout which the intelligence was received with the usual amount of real feeling, accompanied by those expressions of condolence and regret, which, in the present instance, centered in one object—the little orphan girl; and although there were few who, on the first shock of the intelligence, went so far as to surmise or suggest what would be the fate of the child, many days had not passed over, before Mrs. Ashley's full heart unburdened itself of an excessive anxiety to adopt the orphan into her own family.

This benevolent idea would have appeared a perfectly natural one had it emanated from Mrs. Lee; but even the husband and daughters of Mrs. Ashley appeared to be taken by surprise, when that infallible lady, after much wiping of her eyes, declared her determination to have that poor dear orphan removed to M——, and educated beneath her own roof; adding, that she had long thought of it, and that if her father could be brought to accede to her plan, nobody on earth should prevent her devoting herself to the good of that neglected child.

"My dear"—began Mr. Ashley, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Mamma"—began several voices in the same tone.

"I know it," exclaimed the tenderly feeling woman—"I know what you all tell me—that I have already too many claims upon my time and attention—that I am wearing myself away for other people's good ; but I am decided here, Mr. Ashley. And you, girls, need say nothing for your poor mamma ; if she must die for others, she must. I tell you, I will follow the dictates of my own heart in this instance at least ; I will be indulged in my own way for once, because I feel it to be right."

Mr. Ashley, perfectly aware of the strength of this feeling, how often it recurred, and how entirely it bore down the same feeling in other minds, if operating through an opposing channel, deemed it best to be silent, at least for a while ; but the girls, not quite subdued to the same passive acquiescence, still looked enquiringly at their mamma, and even ventured to ask, whether their cousin Kate would not be more likely to be sent to school ?

"You know, my dears," said Mrs. Ashley, "that I never would hear of a school for any of you, and I am sure no one shall accuse me of having less feeling for this friendless orphan than for my own family."

Indeed, upon the whole, it was quite edifying to hear Mrs. Ashley descant upon the situation of this child ; though no one appeared to understand so well as the benevolent lady herself the urgent necessity there was for having her removed from Hatherstone Hall with as little delay as possible. In order to compass this desirable end, Mrs. Ashley wrote one of her most carefully concocted letters to her father. Her heart, of course, was full of sympathy, her pen overflowing with condolence ; but, knowing the



humour of the old gentleman, and how apt he was to interrupt the expression of some of her finest sentiments by an explosion of vulgar irritability, or rude impatience, she ventured not, on the present occasion, to do anything like justice to her emotions, but forced them down, notwithstanding all their violence; rather allowing them to burst forth occasionally in partial and sudden vehemence, than to be fully and distinctly revealed. The letter concluded, however, with an exceedingly fine stroke of eloquence, which may not be considered wholly unworthy of being laid before the notice of the reader; for it is one of the privileges of authorship to be able to disclose, simultaneously with the reading of a letter, the feelings and circumstances under which it was written.

Mrs. Ashley, for instance, had been seated during two successive mornings in a very elegant dressing-room, from which, on the present occasion, she would gladly have excluded all intruders, but that the same exclusion would necessarily have shut her out from the high prerogative of personally giving orders respecting every individual thing transacted within the precincts of her admirably regulated household. Thus, it was a frequent cause of complaint with this excellent lady that she never could be alone; that she was pursued wherever she went; and that nobody was capable of doing anything without her immediate superintendence and direction. Perhaps, under present circumstances, she would really have been willing to sacrifice something of this prerogative, so far at least as related to the ordinary affairs of the day, but that there was an immense preparation of very deep mourning just now occupying every member of the family; and many times before the earnest writer had reached the climax of her most affectionate passage, a tap was heard at the door of her dressing-room,

and an anxious face looked in, intent upon falls, and double falls, and depth of crape and fold, in all those nice gradations which indicate the degree of relationship, if not the degree of sorrow, on the part of the survivors of the recently deceased.

The mourning dresses of the Ashleys, like everything else in which they were concerned, formed the subject of much discussion, and many calculations. It was not simply so much bombazine, and crape trimming, which had to be taken into account : but what depth of mourning would please the old gentleman ; to what extreme of expensive and elaborate display he would be likely to think they ought to go ; and, above all, *how deep the Lees were likely to be*. Thus, whenever the pen of the deeply affected daughter turned again to address itself to her tenderly beloved parent, it was stopped by some inappropriate interruption, such as—"Mamma—mamma, dearest"—for the Ashleys were a wonderfully *dear* family, altogether—"we shall want another piece of crape," not unfrequently answered in the following manner : "I tell you again we must all be very quiet—keep under rather than go beyond. He has the strangest notions in the world, quite rude—plebeian—vulgar ; but we must humour him. It won't be long, you know, dears ; and we can add more crape afterwards. There can be no difficulty about that."

"But, mamma, dear, we shall look just like those Greenwoods over the way. Did you ever see anything like this bonnet?" asked a giggling trio, who had forced their way into the dressing-room, and were making a block of the head of the youngest sister, upon whom they crushed or dragged every article of clothing, until she almost lost her own identity in the various forms she was compelled to assume. These, as a whole, were by no means

flattering to her vanity ; for just in proportion as the sisters generally desired a plea for more ornament, or more expense, it had to be proved upon the person of this ill-fated member of the family, that such and such things actually *would not do*, a process of reasoning which was carried on in a very practical manner, by pulling them into all kinds of squat, grotesque, or unbecoming shapes, and then dragging the block or frame into their mother's presence, as a visible and tangible proof that their arguments were founded on truth, and supported by fact.

Sometimes the tenderly affected daughter, and no less tender mother, was startled in this manner with something like a tear in one eye. At all events, she had her handkerchief very much laid about, and almost constantly applied ; and, considering the great demand there was for it, and the tone of voice in which she spoke, it was remarkable that Mrs. Ashley could give so much attention to the mourning bonnets, and to other points of ordinary discussion submitted to her consideration that day. But she was, to use her own words, a martyr to the happiness of others, always lending a listening ear even to their least important affairs, and thus literally torn in pieces by her own benevolence.

But notwithstanding all their claims, the pen of Mrs. Ashley was still busy with that "dear—dear child." She "would like to be a mother to her ;" it was just stating "not but that she had already many, almost too many claims upon her benevolence ;" and here the eloquent pen was again interrupted by a tap at the door of the dressing-room, not this time accompanied with the giggle which had already introduced so many different exhibitions. It was now a tap of business, and the writer prepared herself to attend.



"It's about that north attic, ma'am," said the voice of Jenkins, a very confidential servant, who was at this time extremely busy with some preparations in a higher story of the house.

"Well, Jenkins, what is it?" asked the mistress of the house.

"I just wished to know," replied the servant, "what condition we are to put that place into? It looks very bad ma'am,—very bad indeed."

"Why, really, Jenkins," replied the lady, "I don't think it is of much consequence going to any great expense; I am not yet quite sure that the child will come at all; and if she should, you know, poor creature, she has nothing in the world,—not one penny of her own. Her mother had nothing; and the whole family are as poor as they are proud. It does such people harm, indeed it is the greatest unkindness in the world, to lift them out of their proper place. I would not on any account have her placed on a level with my own girls. Not but that I should like it; I should like it very much, Jenkins. It would gratify me exceedingly to see her dressed as well as my own girls, and lodged as well, and treated as well in every respect; but you know, Jenkins, it would subject her to so much suffering afterwards. One must think of these things." And the white handkerchief was again raised—"one must think for the orphan, and be a mother to the motherless, and ——"

"And the window, ma'am—there's three frames broken ever since that old tabby cat of Mrs. Peacock's was shut up in the attic, and died, you know, ma'am, in that hole in the ceiling."

"Are they lower panes, Jenkins?"

"Two lower and one upper, ma'am."

“ Well, Jenkins, I thought you would paste them up with clean white paper, and hang a muslin blind,—you know a muslin blind looks so comfortable. It will give quite an air to the little room; and I should like the dear child to be favourably impressed at first.”

Jenkins thought she would be very likely to be impressed with the *air* imparted to the room if the windows were patched up with nothing more than paper; but having a snug way of her own of accomplishing her ends without troubling her mistress more than was necessary, and those ends being often none of the least kind or comfortable, she ascended again the narrow stairs which led up into the attic chamber, determined, if only for her own credit, to make the room already destined for the orphan girl look as habitable as circumstances would allow. In order to do this more effectually, she consulted her mistress no further on this subject, because, where no orders were given, there could be no breach of authority; and thus the eloquent pen was left at liberty to glide on in the dressing-room below, without further interruption; and to wind up its duties with the expression of a fervent wish, that the remaining children of her dear father might ever continue to be a united family, and that he himself—but here the feelings of the writer became too tender for description; and after trying different conclusions to her letter upon at least a dozen different scraps of waste paper, and at last adopting one which read religiously, as well as tenderly, the letter was finally sealed, and sent off, to the inexpressible satisfaction of the writer.

The reading of this letter at the Hall was attended with almost as many calculations, and as much consideration, as the writing of it had cost the tenderly disposed author. Michael Staunton laid it down, and took it up again, at

least a dozen times, and always with a peculiar expression upon his countenance, almost amounting to a smile, and yet not a smile either.

"Margaret," said he, at last, addressing his wondering but silent wife,—for Margaret was one who *could* wonder, and be silent,—“did you ever know that my daughter Ashley had such a kind and sympathising heart,—such a tender solicitude for the orphan and the fatherless?” and he tossed the letter towards her, and then watched her countenance, while she glanced through its carefully written pages.

But Margaret's face, on this occasion, as on most others, might be watched even by the most scrutinizing eye, without the least discovery being made from any change of feature or expression which it was accustomed to betray. To all appearance she thought the letter perfectly right, and natural, under such circumstances, just such a letter as a mother and a Christian ought to write; and so unmoved was the placidity of her own face as she read it, that on looking up she was quite startled to see an expression of ineffable scorn depicted upon that of her husband, as he sat still watching her, and evidently waiting for her comments upon the precious document.

“A very amiable woman, this daughter Ashley of mine, eh! Margaret?”

“It would seem so, from her letter,” replied Margaret in her quiet way.

Michael Staunton laughed outright, and then gave vent to his own impressions and feelings in no measured terms.

“At first,” he said, “I could not exactly understand the woman's drift; and I must say, further, that she has wrapped up her real purpose with more skill than usual. But it's all clear as the day. Don't you see, Margaret,



she's just afraid I should take to that orphan child, and that, in her present forlorn and miserable circumstances, she should win upon me from sheer pity?"

"A very natural and proper thing, I am sure," observed Margaret.

"Yes," replied her lord; "and I am half disposed to do so in earnest, if it were only for the sake of disappointing this artful woman, and seeing what scheme she would try next."

"I wish you would," Margaret ventured to say, for she saw that her husband was in one of his most confidential moods; "I wish you would. The child is very pleasant company here, and grows more and more so every day."

But a sudden cloud came over the countenance of Michael Staunton as she said this; and, sinking back into his chair, he appeared to give himself up to some train of deep but not very pleasing thought. At last he spoke out.

"I can't do it, Margaret. I shall never be able to forget, when I look at her, that she is pleasing herself with thoughts about my death."

Margaret was about to remonstrate, on the score of her youth and childishness; but her husband said, hastily, "Yes, I know all that perfectly well; and I don't, of course, blame the poor child for what is past. I speak of the future; and something must be done to uproot the impressions made upon her mind by that foolish mother of hers. If she remain here, and you make so much of her,—more especially if I should grow to like her myself,—these impressions will all be confirmed, and the child will be ruined. I am half inclined to accept Mrs. Ashley's proposal, and to send her to be educated along with their girls."

Margaret started.

"What's the matter, woman?" asked her husband.

"Nothing," said Margaret. "But—but——"

"But what?" he asked, impatiently. "You might as well speak out at once; for I know you are thinking, like me, that it's precious little motherly kindness the poor orphan will be blessed with there."

"I confess I am afraid," said Margaret.

"What!" exclaimed her husband, with mock earnestness. "Did you not read that sweet letter?"—and he took it up, and read from it many choice passages, again concluding with a loud laugh, and a rent of the silken pages from the top to the bottom.

"I'll tell you what, Margaret," said he, now really in earnest. "You know the child must be educated. We can do nothing in that way for her here. She will be all the better for mixing with others of her own age, or older, for seeing something of human life; and, need I add, for the contemplation of a character so perfect as that of Mrs. Ashley. But, to be serious again, I see nothing for her here but to be actually spoiled. It is all very pleasant to have her running in and out; and I confess, like you, I shall sometimes miss her little foot upon the stairs; but it won't do for her to be living through the best part of her life in this way.

"I should have thought her aunt Lee," Margaret ventured to observe.

Michael Staunton knit his brows, "I dont like that *man*," said he. "I dont trust him, and I never did. I dont wish to have any dealings with him. And as for poor Mary, if I mistake not, she has care enough upon her hands already. No, no, I think I shall come round to Mrs. Ashley's wishes, and perhaps take the child myself, and see how things look. It is many years since I have

entered their doors,—never since they went to live in that country house, which I said then, and I say still, they had no business with.”

“It is a great distance for Mr. Ashley to go backwards and forwards every day,” observed Margaret.

“Yes ; and to hear the woman talk,” replied her husband, “one would think it was entirely for his health that the move was made,—quite a sacrifice on her part. But I’ll go and see them, Margaret, quite unawares, and then I shall judge better how things are.”

It was true enough, as Michael Staunton had observed, that the present residence of Mr. Ashley was as far from his place of business as the necessary going to and fro of the master of the house would allow. It was impossible, said his wife, and all his womankind, to live in the country at all, and be nearer ; and his health, “poor dear man,” rendered it highly desirable that he should have the benefit of a purer and more invigorating air. Accordingly Mr. Ashley, who was really a man of naturally delicate constitution, greatly impaired by the anxieties of a large and not always flourishing business, was under the necessity of rising early every morning, winter and summer ; of snatching a hasty and miserable breakfast at seven, attended upon by a slipshod, half asleep, half dressed, but wholly ill-tempered servant, who found a universal plea for not correcting her errors of half-boiled eggs, and untoasted bread, in the “omnibus” being “at the door, sir ;” a piece of intelligence which she was accustomed to announce with peculiar satisfaction, while Mr. Ashley sought for his own great coat, gloves, umbrella, or whatever might be wanted ; and, first glancing up at the closely-drawn window curtains which still showed the peaceful slumbers of his happy family, then rolled away with other half asleep gentlemen,



jostling side-by-side in a close omnibus, over the stones of long dull streets, dull always at that hour, to be discharged, nearly the last of its living burdens, at the entrance of a dark warehouse in the lowest, filthiest part of the whole town. In this dark warehouse, however, a fortune had once been made, at least what was accounted a fortune then. Here had centered the pride of old Mr. Ashley's heart. Here still lived his aged widow, the mother of the present Mr. Ashley, in a dark room above the entrance, looking out into the street, and listening to the roll of heavy trucks, and waggons, in all probability more musical to her ears than the songs of nightingales. Here too, it must be added for the satisfaction of the reader, that regularly every day, as the clock struck one, a well cooked steak, with sundry relishing condiments, was placed upon the table for Mr. Ashley's especial benefit; and beside it spread the daily paper, which, with a bottle of his favourite wine, would sometimes detain the man of business in this quiet room long after his aged mother, having herself partaken of viands no less comfortably prepared, had sunk back with closed eyes into the soft cushions of an old dreamy chair, in which she dozed away her life.

Mr. Ashley, who spent the middle portion of every day in this manner, considered himself, and was considered by his family, as having dined; he therefore returned, without much anxiety about the time, by a similar conveyance every evening, to drink tea with his wife and daughters. This appeared to be generally considered by all parties as the grand treat of the day. As soon as the children were old enough, they had been each bribed in their turn with the promise of "sitting up to drink tea with papa;" an event which had been made equally useful in the way of privation to those who might be disposed to conduct them-

selves unbecomingly. Upon the whole, however, Mrs. Ashley's discipline of rewards and punishments was so nicely balanced, each so certain to be administered after its kind, that the young people had become great adepts in calculating how far they themselves should lose or gain; or whether, in some instances, the reward would be sufficient for the sacrifice necessary to obtain it—the punishment in reality more disagreeable than the act by which alone it could be avoided.

Differences of opinion on these nice points were, perhaps, the only sources of confusion and disorder in Mrs. Ashley's well governed family; and when this method of adjusting the balance failed, there was so much considered as due to a "dear mamma," who sacrificed everything,—literally "*everything*"—and wept as she told it,—“for her children;”—there was so much due to so excellent, devoted, and self-denying a parent, that the little Ashleys must have had hearts of stone not to have been moved to submission by these constantly repeated, and most powerful and touching appeals. Indeed they were, one and all, very much disposed to believe that dear mamma the most perfect of human beings. They never heard her say that she was wrong, or ever had been wrong; and they saw that she could bring about every object upon which her heart was set; which, after all, was a very powerful argument in favour of her infallibility.

On the occasion already alluded to, when Mrs. Ashley's heart appeared to be set upon the patronage of her little motherless niece, they certainly did question for a while, amongst themselves, in deep secret, and in low whispers only—they did question the desirableness of associating with them, under the same roof, a child whom they had never liked, and who was now regarded as very likely to

stand in the way of their future interests. Indeed, so far beyond their usual daring had the questioning of the family extended on this point, that Mrs. Ashley had been literally compelled to descend a little from the elevated position she had taken amongst motives of pure benevolence, and to allow her family at least a *glimpse* of motives of a somewhat different nature, just slightly mingling with her plan—not taking the lead in it, certainly—she described them as far indeed from that ; but “such as a fond mother must feel for her own.” Here Mrs. Ashley was all human. She confessed it—she deplored it with many tears—but she “could not help it.”

The young people were all convinced accordingly. The husband and father was passive, as usual. The little attic was made ready ; and Kate Staunton was actually to become a member of the Ashley family, during the period when it was most important that her education should be regularly attended to.

In connection with the progress of this education, there were many nice points worthy of attention. Michael Staunton was a rich man. This was the leading fact. He could afford masters in every branch, and he was anxious that Kate should be well educated. How much then was it likely could be got out of these masters for the benefit of the Ashley family, without any additional expense ? Mrs. Ashley was quite sure that a great deal might be done for her girls, with a very *small* addition, at most. Her father knew nothing of these matters ; he was no judge of the charges usually made. He could have no objection, in return for all her trouble, that her own daughters should enjoy some advantages. It was of no use asking him the question, directly ; but of course he would wish it—it was reasonable and right to wish it ; and



really, it seemed to her both more delicate, and more kind, not to trouble him at all about the matter. In trusting the child to her care, he had given the strongest proof of his entire confidence. It would show a littleness of spirit to be perpetually teasing him about petty details—and he so old too, and rest and peace so necessary for him. It was more than ever edifying to hear Mrs. Ashley descant upon these circumstances, and prove, how easy and pleasant it is sometimes to do wrong in a right way.

“Get all your music ready, girls,” said Mrs. Ashley one morning to her daughters. “I want Mr. Davies, when he comes, to see what you have. Your old lessons, you know, will do for the child; and whatever you want can be charged to —; at all events I will take care about that. You have only to think what you *must* have. And be sure you do with as little as possible. If I allow you privileges, you must be considerate.”

But before the important affair of the music was fully settled, a loud knock was heard at the door, and it was a knock of so peculiar a character, that the girls were tempted to peep out of the drawing-room window, in such a manner as to obtain a view between the pillars of the front door of an extraordinary pair of boots, and the tail of a coat such as seldom found entrance there.

“Why, actually,” exclaimed one of the Miss Ashleys, “there’s an old country man standing at the front door. I dare say he has cream cheeses to sell.”

“Girls! girls!” exclaimed Mrs. Ashley, spreading out her arms like a magician who would dispel a present scene to make way for another.—“Girls—run—fly—put on your other frocks!”

“Oh, which? mamma—what is it?”

“Without the crape flounces, I tell you—instantly. And

come down very quiet. It's your grandpapa, actually come himself!"

"That old man grandpapa?" said the last retiring nymph, who had only just time to escape, before the old man himself was ushered into the drawing-room, leading little Kate in his hand.

It really seemed to Mrs. Ashley that her father had been perverse enough, on this occasion, to dress himself in the oldest and shabbiest suit of clothes that he had in his house. Whether this had really been the case, or whether it was the elegance of her own drawing-room which produced a stronger contrast than she was at all prepared for, the lady of the house was scarcely so far mistress of herself as to be able to welcome her parent with those demonstrations of affectionate delight, which, had she been at all aware of his coming, would certainly have been prepared for his reception. Upon the whole, however, being a woman of more nerve than she gave herself credit for, she got through the performance wonderfully well, and even had raptures in reserve for her "dear little niece," who stood gazing up into her face with an expression of blank astonishment, and at the same time twisting her little homely features about in so comic a way, that her grandfather, himself impressed in a similar manner, was so delighted and amused with the child, as to feel very much in the mind to take her home again with him.

"I am really delighted to see you," said Mrs. Ashley, in her blandest manner, again pressing the child closer to her side; for she could not comprehend that strange vacant look that sate upon her countenance, and was beginning to feel quite embarrassed under it. "I am so delighted to see you," she kept repeating, for she found those words most convenient to say.

"You don't look so," said Kate, at last, while the comic expression of her countenance deepened into an arch smile, and Michael Staunton laughed outright.

This laugh, however, was interrupted by the entrance of the five daughters of the house, who walked into the room according to their ages, and advanced to curtsy to their grand-papa in a manner so grave and subdued, that little Kate immediately ceased to smile, but looked more puzzled and confounded than ever.

Mr. Staunton got through the ceremony in the best way he could. Happily for him it was soon over; and the five young ladies, in black, remained seated upon five chairs, directly opposite to him, during the remainder of the interview.

"You seem to have a nice place here, daughter Ashley," said Mr. Staunton.

"A most sweet place," replied the lady, glad to turn to so pleasant a topic of conversation.

"And pray how much may it stand you in for rent?" asked the old gentleman.

"My dear papa! you are really so droll," said the lady. "You know that *we* have nothing to do with such matters;" and she looked round to her daughters.

"I know that you can wish for such places," said her father,— "beg for them—wheedle for them—plague a man's life out for them—and never rest till you get them. But let me see. Hav' n't you got some public gardens out this way—a sort of park? I have heard a great deal about the improvements at this end of the town; and it's many years, you know, since I was here. One may as well see something when one does come out of the chimney-corner. Perhaps these young ladies would put on their bonnets, and walk with us; eh, Kate, what do you say?"



Whatever Kate might say to such a proposal, it was evident the young ladies had a great deal to think ; and that their prudent mother too was by no means satisfied in her own mind what was best, at so critical a moment, to be done. To affront her father by telling him to his face that her five daughters were ashamed to walk with him in a public promenade ; or actually to let them walk with him there,—there, where the *élite* of the whole neighbourhood walked at that hour of the day, and where her own daughters were so often seen, and so well known—what was to be done ?—what *could* be done, impromptu at such a crisis ?—was there no rain above ?—she looked out, and the sky was without a cloud—no damp below ?—her fathers boots were thick with dust. Ah ! had it been possible to ticket him, to have written in large letters upon his back “ *Old, and very wealthy, and nobody in particular to leave his money to,*” how many persons besides the Misses Ashley, would have been proud and pleased to walk with old Michael Staunton in the public promenade that day.

As it was, but without this ticket, the thing seemed impossible ; more especially, as the eldest girl had a lesson with her music master that morning ; the second a dreadful headache ; the third had been lame for three days ; the fourth had sent her bonnet to be cleaned ; the fifth—Mrs. Ashley laid her hand very impressively upon the shoulder of the youngest, the same young lady who was accustomed to have the unbecoming bonnets fitted on ; and whispering something into her ear, which produced immediate symptoms of obedience, such as flushed cheeks, and pouting lips, the young lady left the room, to vent what further feelings she might be the subject of upon her bonnet strings, her gloves, and her parasol, all which were materially the worse for that day's wear.

Their use, however, for the present, was restricted to a slow and sullen descent into the drawing-room; for Michael Staunton, seeing at once what was the matter with the young ladies, that so far from being afflicted in the different ways described, they had all been attacked with one complaint, and that rather severely—a strong disinclination to be seen in public with *him*,—seeing this, as clearly as he was accustomed to see things in general, Michael Staunton had risen from his seat, without waiting for the young martyr upon whom the lot had fallen to be his companion, and taking little Kate by the hand, had uttered these ominous and not easily forgotten words: “Come, little Kate; you are your old grandfather’s best friend, after all.”

Mrs. Ashley was deeply affected by this expression of her father’s; so were the girls. Indeed, the time of his absence was almost entirely occupied by the whole family in blaming one another, and all thinking they had made a bad business of it. They spread out for him, however, a very plentiful luncheon, of which he partook on returning from his walk; and after hastily and coldly settling all business matters with his daughter, departed from the house, without any very strong desire to visit it again, and with only one heart in it wishing that he might.

## CHAPTER IX.



It becomes necessary to the interest of this story that the reader should now travel with us ; not indeed into a foreign country, nor to a distant portion of our own, but simply to another outlet from the great bustling town which has already been described ; for if we mistake not, there is sufficient agitation of human life, and exercise of human feeling, within the precincts of any one of our thickly peopled towns or cities, to afford ample materials for the writer, even without exaggeration or extravagance of any kind. Indeed, if the taste of the gentle reader be to overleap the bounds of probable reality, we must in common honesty declare, that these pages are not for her, or him ; for truth is the only point of excellence at which the writer aims, and human life as it is the only picture from which her scenes are drawn.

But to our story ; for we have now to look in upon a different family, situated in an opposite quarter of the town, and holding no intercourse at present with any of the characters already described. The place we have to enter does not look particularly interesting to the casual observer. It is a large brick building, exactly like many other brick buildings in the same neighbourhood, with five steps up to the door in front, and a small garden en-



closed within high walls at the back. On a nearer view, the large brass plate upon the front entrance discloses the fact that the occupant is an engineer ; and there is a bell on the side of the door, with the word *office* under it, in pretty large letters, as if that department of the establishment was the most important.

And so in truth it is ; for seldom does any visitor find admittance there, except by ringing at the office-bell. Few people, in fact, know anything about there being a dwelling-house at all ; and those who dwell there usually make their exits and their entrances by a little private garden door which opens into a sort of back lane.

But let us walk in, and see for ourselves ; for on glancing in at this private door, there is really a very pretty and inviting little garden to be seen. It is thickly strewed, to be sure, with autumn leaves, and the walks look rather mouldy and damp ; but that the garden is not wholly neglected may be seen by the vigorous raking of a tall young girl, who, with dishevelled hair as black as the raven's wing, bare arms, and neck, and torn frock hanging loosely on her person, appears to be labouring in a very diligent and praiseworthy manner to get the place into better order, by collecting all the scattered leaves into one heap in a central part of the garden. The girl, for there is no telling by her appearance whether she is a lady or not, must have worked very hard at this laudable employment, for her cheeks look flushed and warm, and her whole soul seems to be absorbed in what she is doing. While there is a leaf left out of its place, she ceases not, but stretches out her rake most vigorously, and fetches them up out of their hiding places beneath the shrubs ; and now and then, a fitful breeze sweeps past, and the boughs rustle overhead, and then her work is all to do again.

This kind of exercise has gone on for a long time, and the dark haired girl, with her bare arms, and torn frock, has worked herself into a sort of feverish impatience at the constant falling of the leaves, and the consequent fruitlessness of her labour. At last she rests upon her rake, and casting up to the trees a look of defiance from her large black eyes, she rushes in upon her heap ; and seizing an arm full of the leaves, scatters them about to the four winds of heaven, laughing all the while, and looking all about her with a sort of gipsy wildness ; looking, in fact, as if she had no business there, pent up within those narrow walls ; and, worst of all, with nothing in the world to do, but to rake up those dead leaves, which strew the ground far faster than she can gather them together.

Dorothy Dalrymple, for that was the name of the raven-haired girl, was thoroughly tired with her strong exercise, when she went into the house, and thoroughly disappointed that it was of no use. Like everything else, it *was* of no use to her, beyond the healthy circulation which it had promoted. "Nothing," she said, "was of any use;" her life was of no use ; and in this she spoke the truth. Her bodily frame was full of health, and strength, but she had nothing to do ; her mind was full of talent, but she had nothing to employ it upon ; her heart was at that time full of feeling, but she had nobody to love or to care for. It was a living death which the girl endured, all through the early years of her life ; and neither she herself, nor anybody connected with her, knew what was the nature of the malady under which she suffered.

The connections of Dorothy Dalrymple were, however, extremely few, and those who interested themselves about her, still fewer. Her father saw that she breakfasted and dined, every day that he was at home—what could the

girl want more? He even brought in a few books occasionally, the remnants of a sale, or the leavings of some tenant who had been ejected; for he was a man who had some little agencies upon his hands, who accepted unpleasant jobs which nobody else liked to do, and so crept on through many callings—on—on; and yet was always poor. His own opinion was, that he had never had capital enough for a *fair start*: but that, if once launched, he should sail gloriously. And perhaps he was not far wrong.

Indeed there were many circumstances greatly in Mr. Dalrymple's favour. He was unquestionably a clever man, and a fine looking man,—a man who bore about with him the appearance of being well bred, and well connected. He only wanted the money; and oh! how he did wish, and pine, and fret himself, for that! How many deficiencies would that single item have supplied? How it would have covered the great want of proper education for his business; for it was by the merest chance that Mr. Dalrymple had become an engineer, and not a musical instrument maker. And here he was, occupying large and expensive premises, and dressing well, and looking and walking like a gentleman, and talking about his "clerks," and his "office," and the business he was "doing, out yonder." And he wagged his head when he said this, sometimes to one quarter of the globe, and sometimes to another. It did not signify much what portion of the world was indicated by that expressive gesture, for he had a look with him that carried some weight, notwithstanding the uncertainty which remained upon men's minds, as to the precise business which Mr. Dalrymple was *doing*; and notwithstanding, too, the extreme silence which usually prevailed throughout the region of his office—a silence very difficult to understand by persons at all accus-



tomed to the neighbourhood of an office of that description, containing clerks of any kind.

Not that we would convey an idea that Mr. Dalrymple's office never was entered. He really had business to transact sometimes ; and there was a veritable clerk, or at all events, if not an articulated clerk, there was a young man constantly in attendance there—a poor relation, who always came when called, and looked very inky when he did come, as if accustomed to do a great deal of mapping and other work with pens and paper.

After all, however, Mr. Dalrymple was not a mere pretender, unless in the way of having an engagement to dine out himself, when any one called who ought to have been asked to partake of that refreshment with him ; he was not a mere pretender, but a man of real work—of slavish, hard, night and day work, when he had anything to do ; and little as this was, he was certainly getting on, for he had once had less, and been poorer than he was now. He had once—but it was of no use looking back. Mr. Dalrymple never looked back. His course was onward—onward. Would the time never come when he should have a lucky start?—and then !

Yes, Mr. Dalrymple was a fine looking man, and a clever man, whose position in society was never doubted, because of that air which he had about him, and the wonderful tact with which he carried all things off that might have otherwise betrayed his actual poverty—his bitter, biting poverty, and the difficulty he had always had to keep himself from sinking. Thus far, however, all his desperate attempts to *rise* had failed him. One of these had been to marry well, as the world calls it ; but the lady's father had never forgiven her the match ; and on her death, which took place a short time after she became a

mother, he had found himself, with the helpless burden of an infant daughter on his hands, irrevocably separated from his wife's connexions.

Poor little babe ! Those were sad circumstances under which she came into the world—not wanted there, and no one caring if she closed her eyes upon the light to open them no more. The nurse believed she would, and fixed the actual time for her departure, because the clock upon the stairs had struck one stroke too many, and a half starved dog in the back yard had howled at the same moment, and a candle had gone out, and other certain signs had indicated that precisely at twelve o'clock on a particular night Dorothy Dalrymple would be no more. That fatal night in due course had arrived. The nurse was all upon the alert ; but so far from departing this life, the child had slept soundly, and awoke with early morning, opening her black eyes upon the light, and looking round as if she meant to live, in spite of fate.

Whether it is that such unwished for children seldom do die, or that when they do it is taken as a mere matter of course, and nothing said about it, the fact is certain, that many struggle on in spite of circumstances, in spite of angry twitchings and tossings from a wearied nurse, who never expected to have that item of labour added to her load ; in spite of food alternately too hot, and then too cold, and only administered when there is time to give it ; in spite of interminable shriekings, which, little cared for, fill up the intermediate space ; in spite of countless falls which no hand is stretched out to prevent ; in spite of grovellings amongst mud and mire, and long rollings upon cold damp stones, accompanied by a perpetual tendency to be face downwards in the dust ; in spite of all this, and of those moving accidents, if not by flood and field, any

one of which would be enough to kill the heir apparent of a throne, such children do live on, and thrive, and grow ; and in their health and vigour often put to shame our plans of nursery training—nay, even educating too ; yet while they do this, establishing the fact, that human life is precious to its Giver, that all its secret springs and moving impulses have been provided for, and still are kept from harm, and guided and preserved for purposes which man's neglect is not permitted to defeat.

Thus grew the child, unwatched, uncared for ; not unkindly treated beyond such neglect, for the father was a man who never in his heart had cherished a positively unkind or malignant purpose towards any one. It might even be said of him, that of the two modes of conduct he *preferred* the kind ; he took it for granted every body did the same ; that kindness was a thing of course ; and consequently it was not his practice ever to speak harshly, or wantonly to give another person pain. Why should he ? There was nothing to be gained by it. Therefore he allowed the little child to run beside him in the garden, and even to play about his feet, and did not strike her, because there was no reason in it, and it would not pay.

Thus grew the child, from year to year, with nobody to exchange a word with, except her father and one old servant. She was a dark, strange, incomprehensible child, as might have been supposed, with eyes so large and flashing ; the servant said they frightened her, when peeping out amongst the bushes in the garden. And so she peeped and played, and counted pebbles, and plucked the petals from the flowers, until her father thought it time to send her to a neighbouring school, to learn her daily lessons at the cheapest rate. Here she fought with other children, tore their books, and bit and kicked, until sometimes the



old servant had to fetch her home convulsed and black with passion, and only escaping the disgrace of public exposure by the woman's apron being closely wrapped about her face, as she ran hastily across the street, and in at the back door, with her unpromising and most rebellious charge.

As time passed on, however, Dorothy improved: she learned, herself, to feel the shame of such exposures; and though she cared not for reproof, she shrunk from ridicule; and thus she came to exercise the power of self-command, whenever it suited her purpose to do so. This power was exercised first in her father's presence, and then in time it grew to be habitual. To her he was a strange mysterious being, whose movements formed the only events in her dull life worth thinking of. She never thought of loving him, more than she loved the picture of her mother—perhaps not half so much; but she admired her father, and fancied he must be a wonderfully clever man. One thing, as she grew older, puzzled her exceedingly. How was it that he had ever been married? What could a wife have been to him? How could a man so silent and incommunicable have sat at table with a woman with any show of common sociability? Strange, foolish thoughts to fill the mind of the young girl! and yet they often came into her mind; and sometimes she looked up into her father's face, with those dark eyes of hers, and felt as if she must speak out; and then the strange effect which such a question was calculated to produce so tickled her wild fancy, that she hid her face and laughed; but no one asked her why. And thus she grew, and laughed away *internally* the secrets of her incommunicable existence, known to no one, and not yet understood even by herself.

One fact alone, in relation to his daughter, seemed

evident to Mr. Dalrymple—she must be educated; not after the usual fashion, of learning every thing, or rather, of receiving lessons and having masters in every branch of learning and accomplishments; his views were far enough from that; but something she must learn—that was certain; and sorely was he puzzled how to obtain this something, without paying for it in the current coin of the realm. Day-schools there were in plenty round about the neighbourhood where she lived; and cheap enough, one might have thought, to suit the most necessitous; but Dorothy was such a girl for romping, tearing, and destruction, amongst other children, that the old servant was of opinion the expenditure on clothes, during this process of instruction, was beyond what any schooling could be worth: nor was her father altogether of an opposite way of thinking.

Awaiting the decision of her master, on this difficult and important question, the old servant had for some time deemed it most prudent to keep Dorothy at home; and now the long months, from Christmas to the time of the scattering of autumn leaves, had elapsed, without any prospect of improvement in her circumstances, or the dawning of enlightenment upon her mind.

In this dull and desert life, one of the few amusements upon which Dorothy dared to calculate was the examination of the handwriting on the backs of her father's letters, as they lay upon the breakfast-table, before he came down in the morning; and it happened, about this time, that her curiosity was more than usually excited by a small and delicate female hand upon the cover of a letter which appeared to be very closely filled. In vain did Dorothy ponder, peep, and calculate upon what could possibly be within. The letter was to all intents and purposes a sealed

document to her: and when her father came down, and turned it over and over, and then laid it aside until he had swallowed his accustomed portion of faintly coloured tea, and had silently crunched up his dry toast, (for Mr. Dalrymple never ate butter,) Dorothy made up her mind, without one shadow of doubt, that there was something in that letter beyond the ordinary course of business,—that it was, in fact, an eventful letter; perhaps fraught with something of importance which concerned her actual self.

Poor Dorothy! nothing in life as yet *had* very much concerned that self; and yet she was far from having given the matter up,—about as far as any human being could be,—for she had an ambitious fancy, ever busily at work, even in her dry desert solitude; and though the castles which she built were of necessity all built of sand, and liable at every moment to be swept away, it pleased her humour to keep building on; for thus she lived, in cities of her own—a very queen in her Palmyra.

Not that the girl had knowledge of such places, nor did she even build with sentiment, thus far; the simple brick and mortar of creation formed her element, herself the sole creator of the world in which she lived. She owned no fellowship; she knew no sympathies. How should she? No one ever had felt sympathy for her. If she loved anything in human form, she loved herself. At all events she loved to gratify herself with her own will and way; but yet she knew her own defects too well to look upon herself with admiration. No; she had a vague, strange sense that *something* was to be admired; but what it was, and where to find it, these were the deep secrets of existence to her young and wondering mind—deep secrets, yet to be revealed.

But the letter. So soon as Mr. Dalrymple had break-



fasted, he opened it, and read it through, crossed as it was, and closely written,—he read it to the very end, and then sat thinking. The fact was, that out of that poor letter the father was constructing a scheme for his daughter's education. He had a maiden sister, poor, like himself, but educated for a governess, who having long pursued her calling without much increase of her worldly wealth, had lost her health ; and having spent the remnant of her last quarter's payment in the luxury of advice from a fashionable physician, he had recommended *rest*, and *change of scene*, as absolutely necessary for the restoration of her nervous system to its proper tone. Hearing that her dear brother was now so agreeably situated, and feeling it was a very long time since they had met, Miss Dalrymple was of course most affectionately inclined towards her brother's house. It is true this inclination had often developed itself on former occasions, without being reciprocated ; for the brother was by no means at a loss, either then or now, for expedients which might very properly, and with great show of reason, have turned away the coming visitor ; yet under present circumstances a thought arose, whether such a visit might not be turned to good account.

All day this thought was pondered, and for many following days, until at last a letter still more urgent came, announcing that the lady actually was to leave her situation on a certain day ; and, hearing nothing from her brother, concluded it would be quite agreeable to him to receive her as proposed. It was indeed high time that Mr. Dalrymple should be decided one way or another, and making the most it was possible to make of pressing circumstances ; the fact of his sister's illness was so ingeniously placed against his inability to receive her, as to

render it a matter of absolute justice—an apparently agreeable and equitable arrangement, that her small services employed in the management of his household on principles of the strictest economy, and the entire education of his daughter, should stand against the accommodation which she was by no means backward to lay claim to.

Mr. Dalrymple having expressed himself on these points in such a manner as to render it impossible that his meaning should be misunderstood, having left no hole to creep out for his sister to claim the smallest pecuniary remuneration, or to shrink in any way from her household and educational duties, without thereby forfeiting her right to be a member of his family, and fed at his board; his letter was dispatched without delay, lest by any mischance the lady should arrive without a perfect knowledge of the precise terms upon which alone she was permitted to come.

Nor let these instances of careful forethought and prudential preparation strike the generous reader as necessarily emanating from a mean spirit, or a hard and unfeeling heart. The world has many meaner ways, and many more unkind ones too, than where the circumstances of mutual accommodation are clearly explained and stipulated for beforehand. There can be no mistake then—no kindly feeling trusted to, believed in, acted upon, and then shown clearly, after weeks and months, to have been grudged at the very time, until the poor recipient grows sick at heart with the memory of past dinners partaken of in innocence at such a board. Yes, these are the bitter and unpalatable thoughts which make dependence hateful to remembrance, and horrible in prospect. But to know beforehand exactly how every meal is to be paid for, and to know also that it will be paid for thus in full, this is

precisely the plan, upon which relations, parties of all descriptions, may jostle together, may eat and drink at the same table, may warm themselves in comfort by the same fire, and sleep in peace beneath the same roof, without ever having the pangs of wounded feeling added to their lot.

It was then upon these terms that Mr. Dalrymple received his sister as a member of his household, taking care, amongst other things, clearly to explain that the term of her residence was for one year only, and that her present admission had no reference whatever to any time beyond that period; for this also is a very important item in the sum of obligations of a hospitable nature, either given or received. Nor was the lady in the slightest degree wounded or repelled by the nature of her reception. She was just the kind of person to be dealt with in this manner, having been accustomed to such treatment all her life.

But there was one member of Mr. Dalrymple's household to whom the coming of this lady was an event of the most profound interest, watched for, thought about, and calculated upon, in all its probable and improbable bearings, by night and by day, as if the destiny of future years was to hang upon it. Dorothy had never seen her aunt; and oh, what she would have given sometimes while sitting silently beside her father, and watching him with those intense black eyes—what she would have given, had giving been at all a thing within the range of her capabilities, to have asked him about the personal appearance of this wonderful aunt; whether she was tall, or short, light haired, or dark, about what style she dressed in, and anything, in short, which might in the least degree tend to unravel the mystery of that great event which was about to change the whole tone and aspect of her own life.

While thus wishing, wondering, and waiting, the great



event itself at last was brought about; and to every mind but Dorothy's, it would have appeared that Miss Dalrymple travelled with wonderful celerity, considering how recently her brother's letter, with permission to come, had been sent off. All day had Dorothy been asking the old servant—the only person of whom she could ask anything, what she thought her aunt would be like, how she would be dressed, what she would do, and where she would always sit; and she had actually placed three chairs around the little table in the parlour, as a preliminary step, to see how things were likely to look; for Dorothy had never seen three chairs so placed in all her life, and, to her unaccustomed eye, they looked so strange, that a fit of laughter occupied her for some time after this arrangement, much heightened in its mirth by the idea that her father would have to be polite.

Nothing however that Dorothy could do was able to make the chairs look sociable. There seemed to be a presentiment in these dumb witnesses that social comfort and converse would rise to no higher tone than hitherto. But old chairs that have borne the weight of many generations are very depressing things to look around upon; and whoever wishes to introduce a new system into his household, to begin afresh with life, or to make any important change in which his domestic economy is concerned, let him beware of old chairs!

"How provoking," said Dorothy to the servant, "that that stupid coach never comes in before nine o'clock. I shall not be able to see what my aunt is like."

"You'll see that soon enough, or I'm mistaken," was the amiable reply; for the ancient domestic had lived so long sole queen of her own realm, that the idea of oversight, and still worse of interference, had already stirred up

all the gall and bitterness which mingled in her usually stagnant nature.

“Do you think papa will go to meet her?” was another point which Dorothy flew into the kitchen to discuss, so soon as the idea flashed across her mind. But this question was answered by the utterance of a peculiar kind of sound, which the pen of the writer has not yet learned how to spell. It meant, accompanied as it was with a shrug of the shoulders, and a toss of the head,—“I should think not, indeed! He has something else to do than to run after any one like her. She has taken care of herself so far. What should hinder but she may find her way here without being met; more especially since she is so anxious to come.”

All this being clearly understood by Dorothy, who from long and intimate association had become a great proficient in that style of remark, either expressed or implied; and, not wishing to have any damp cast upon her own anticipations, she ran back again into the parlour to look at the tree chairs, and to pick, if she dared to pick, another coal to lay upon the scanty fire.

Once or twice Dorothy had ventured to suggest that the candle, the tall solitary candle, which stood upon the parlour table, should be lighted; but this being so entire a breach of the household rule, which forbade the parlour candle to be found burning until Mr. Dalrymple came in at supper time,—Dorothy being always supposed to be gone to bed, or if not, having frequently to be reminded that she had not yet *earned* the value of a candle on her own behalf, she was compelled to content herself on the present occasion with folding up a piece of paper ready to apply to the tall candle, on the very first intimation that footsteps were approaching the door.

Of course the poor relation in the office had been sent to meet the coach, to welcome the expected guest, and to conduct her to her brother's house; but he having no orders about a carriage to convey the lady and her appendages, which consisted of more cloaks, shawls, trunks, and bandboxes, than the clerk had ever seen belonging to one individual in all his life, considerable delay took place at that centre of confusion where the passengers and all their baggage were discharged in the quickest possible time, in order that the rapid vehicle might gallop off again on its journey southwards; so that Dorothy had to wait a most unreasonable length of time before her curiosity could be gratified, on any one of those innumerable points to which it had been directed through the day.

At last, instead of the roll of carriage wheels up to the door, was heard the feet, as if of weary and heavy laden travellers, upon the steps; and sundry dull bulging sounds like boxes, bags, and other appliances knocking against the door and iron railing, before either bell or knocker could be reached.

Oh! then indeed did the heart of Dorothy Dalrymple beat high. It was the first event in life which had ever happened to her, beyond her being sent to a day school; and she lighted her tall candle forthwith.

The poor relation was a young man who very seldom spoke; and Dorothy could therefore more distinctly hear a female voice, with no little asperity, directing certain people to go away; and, as if to pacify some urgent demands, most impressively assuring them that Mr. Dalrymple would settle everything in the morning. In all probability the parties knew better than that; for in spite of all argument and remonstrance, they would not go;



but even placed themselves in the doorway, in such a manner as to prevent its being closed ; so that, after an ineffectual attempt on the part of the lady to obtain *change* out of the house, on the plea of having none herself, she was compelled to draw out her own meagre purse, and dismiss the applicants with the least possible amount of remuneration which could ensure their departure.

What was Dorothy to make of all this ? Future years would develop what that eagerly contemplated event had brought to her ; but at present she had enough to do to watch a very uninteresting looking personage attempting to untie a number of strings, none of which could be found, and none of which Dorothy ever once thought of helping her to find ; while a low murmuring voice kept up a sort of running grumble about those other trunks that never would be forthcoming ; the biscuits bought at Birmingham and left in the pocket of the coach ; and above all, the ivory handled umbrella, which that stupid young man had been told again and again not to leave hold of on any account whatever.

Alas ! for poor Dorothy, a heavy damper had been sent to her, instead of a quick stimulant. Perhaps she needed it. At all events she has our best wishes that she may profit by the event.

## CHAPTER X.



HAVING introduced the reader in due form to some of the principal characters who will have to fill a conspicuous position in these pages, we have now to ask that gentle personage to imagine, with us, that some four or five years have elapsed since we last looked in upon the Lees and the Ashleys, or listened to the song of the robin amongst the autumn leaves, as they were then scattered upon the garden walks, and around the bowers of Hatherstone Hall.

The old hall is still the same. What would the lapse of five or six fleeting years be likely to effect, where centuries had wrought so little change? Nor are the living occupants much altered either. The lord of the mansion takes his accustomed walk at the same hour, with perhaps a shade more feebleness about his step and look, and, it may be, the slightest possible tendency to stoop forward as he walks. A few more grey hairs, too, are woven in amongst his once luxuriant locks; but still the flashing of his bright and penetrating eye is quick as ever; and, judging by the stern strong voice in which he calls to his man Thomas, and the determined stroke

of his old walking-stick upon the ground, as if he planted it, with his opinions and assertions, there, and there for ever, there is little reason to calculate upon the inner man having lost any portion of that firmness and decision by which, from youth to age, the master of Hatherstone has been so strongly characterized.

On entering the hall, we see at once that nothing has been altered since the day when Arnold Lee brought home the favourite old pony, after his luckless ride. Even the impression made upon Michael Staunton's mind is precisely the same as on that disastrous afternoon; and, although in the course of nature the poor animal would by this time, in all probability, have shared the final doom of all mortality, the conviction is firmly rooted in her master's mind, that the cause of her departure from this world was neither less nor more than the barbarous and cruel race which his disobedient and rebellious grandson had ridden. From that day there had been few of the friends of Arnold Lee who ever dared to plead on his behalf with Michael Staunton; and those few had cause to fear that their kind endeavours had rather made the case worse than better. By way of showing that his resentment was confined only to the offending party, however, Michael Staunton had been studious to evince the utmost kindness towards his daughter Mary; and as his opportunities of exercising this affectionate interest were but few, on learning that Lucy had fallen into delicate health, he had even gone so far as to express a wish that she should try the change of air to Hatherstone, where she would have the advantage of Margaret's tender and judicious care.

The proposal of this plan, and its immediate adoption by the parents of Lucy, had caused great sensation in



many quarters; but in none was the agitation it excited carried to a greater extent than amongst the Ashleys, where the clever and managing lady who governed the affairs of the family, and governed them so well, began seriously to fear that her promising schemes might all be defeated by this new movement, and defeated in a manner infinitely more repugnant to her own feelings than if the entire amount of the Hatherstone property had been bequeathed to the orphan child of her brother.

At the period now under consideration, the star of the Lees appeared to be decidedly in the ascendant. Mr. Lee himself, as a man of business, had branched out in many ways. From the time of his partnership with Mr. Hamilton his affairs had prospered, or appeared to prosper, in a wonderful manner. Some persons ventured to surmise that his prosperity was not real, and that there would come a time—but here they only shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders, with an implied congratulation of themselves, that the party in question had no property of theirs.

With all his apparent prosperity, however, Mr. Lee was not more happy, more frank, or more communicative, in his own family. The last five years had deepened as many hard wrinkles in his weary-looking brow; and his once black hair was now changed into a cold iron-grey, which harmonized the more completely with his general appearance, from which nothing could be gathered by the observer of extremes of any kind. He was like a man in whom the soul was dead—gone out—extinguished; so little did his outward bearing reveal of the workings that were carried on within. That these were unremitting, exhausting, vexatious, and often almost more than human strength could bear, might be gathered from

his short and sleepless nights, his thin and haggard frame, and, worse than all, the increased irritability, which made him at once a terror to his family and a misery to himself. In short, he seemed to have neither time nor feeling left to love a single human being. Perhaps it might have been different, had his daughter Lucy remained near him, for her he once did love ; but it had been his wish, more than any one's, that she should live at Hatherstone ; and of all who hailed with satisfaction the tidings that she was happy there, and growing every day in favour with her grandfather, he was the only one who hung upon those tidings with a kind of eager appetite, which seemed to be increased by what it fed on.

And Mr. Lee was what the world calls a clever, prosperous man of business ; and oh ! how some eyes gloated on his very name ; how pleased were poor apprentices and journeymen, and fathers of large families, to get him to speak a word for their advancement ; how eager were lone widows, and women with small incomes, to seek his advice in the disposal of their scanty means ; how soft, and humble, and conciliating were the words of fallen greatness, when soliciting his aid ; how trembling, suppliant, and abashed, were all who lived upon his wages, when they felt themselves beneath the shadow of his frown ; above all, how envious were the bankrupt and the poor, and how often did they wish themselves like him !

Like him ? why, he was scarcely human. His natural functions had well nigh ceased to act. His eyes had nearly ceased to sleep, his stomach to digest, his tongue to utter the common language of a man. His head—to use a not unapt expression—seemed made to *ache with*. Alternate stupor, and whirls, and giddiness, and ringing of loud

bells, had taken possession of it—demons, that no skill of famed physician, or power of medicine, could exorcise. These he had in plenty—these, and every thing that money could procure; but still he could not purchase sleep—not even by those deep dark draughts that sent him to his bed weighed down, but not asleep; there to dream one hour, and then to wake!—perhaps to hear the clock strike two, and then to count the hours till morning light.

And yet there was no reasonable ground for murmuring or complaint. This man was only reaping as he had sown. Thousands upon thousands would have been glad to do the same. He had worshipped from his youth up, one idol, into whose temple he was now admitted, to share the privileges there. He had known from first to last the nature of that worship. He had never been deceived. His god was Mammon. All the world, even from old time, could tell him what that god required to render him propitious; all could tell him—men, and books, but chiefly one book above all others, into which he seldom looked; it was a volume by no means suited to his present circumstances. It did not make him comfortable, nor build him up, nor say to him, “go on, thou good and faithful servant. Thine is the way of peace.” No. There was at present a strong necessity upon him, that he should not look into this book. Hear it he must, one day in seven; for he went up like others at the hour of public worship, with his wife and children, to the house of prayer, to stand bare-headed there, and call upon the holy name with seemly countenance and attitude, as if *he* worshipped too. And no one questioned of the inner man about the life that *he* was leading, all went so well without, and looked so reputable, and so decent—so much as prosperous mer-



chandise in Christian countries for the most part does look.

It was about this time that two youths, not long ago initiated into the mysteries of merchandise in the dark office of Mr. Lee, feeling greatly at a loss what to do with their Sundays, used to go strolling away as soon as the morning service was over, away down by the river side, to watch the steamers off across the water, or the heavy-laden ships come in—in short, to see whatever might be seen, and talk and trifle off their hands, the time between that hour and dinner.

Friends still, as intimate as ever, these young men however, were but seldom agreed exactly upon the quarter to which their steps should be directed. Both youths were handsome, but one was tall and slender, the other muscular and firmer in his make. He was the graver too, and he it was, who always chose the country walk, down through some quiet lanes, which led to a small village by the water side. Here as the most sequestered spot within their reach, it was his wont to ramble thoughtfully, and often with some favourite book, not inappropriate to the day. But the other youth had no such taste, and so if ever they disagreed, it was in this that Arnold wandered in the lanes and fields, while his companion found no pleasure there, but went to news rooms, or to places where something might be seen or heard.

It was not often, however, that Arthur Hamilton, who was now a merchant's clerk, spent his Sundays in the great town. Happily for him, he had the means of escape in a more liberal allowance of pocket money, than his friend was the possessor of. Thus he usually escaped as soon as business hours were over on the Saturday, and not unfrequently prolonged his absence one day at least,

beyond the appointed time of his return. The simple fact was this—he hated his occupation in that counting-house, and everything connected with it; and thus he spun out the hours of absence from it as a matter of course, without perhaps ever entertaining any serious hope of quitting it altogether. Indeed, Arthur Hamilton was thus far in his history, a mere creature of impulse, led about by every momentary inclination, and rather like a caged bird fluttering against its prison bars, and spending strength of claw and bill, in very spite upon them; than like a man of rational and steady purpose, forming definite plans for his escape, and acting out such plans consistently and firmly.

Thus when the two youths walked together by that river side, Arthur would exclaim with vehemence against their present way of life, pent up like criminals without the power to exercise the natural faculties of free-born and intelligent men; and, raving in this manner, would sometimes rush on board some quickly sailing vessel, and shout farewell to all the horrors of their mutual lot. It might have formed an admirable study for an artist, could he have watched the youths, as Arthur Hamilton said this. All that he did was just the fitful effervescence of a boyish passion, evaporating with the impulse of the moment, sometimes subsiding even before the words in which it found expression had been uttered. But in the look and form of Arnold there was something almost startling, though he seldom spoke of escaping from his doom, nor wasted either words or feeling in complaints. No one in fact, within his father's country house—his father least of all, suspected he was anything but happy, and contented there. Industrious, busy, and attentive—these he most assuredly was, and would have been wherever his lot had rendered it his duty to be so. But the silence he main-

tained on all such themes, so different from his friend's loquacity, had a deep meaning in it ; and often when they talked of the delights of emigration, that favourite theme with youths like them, his eye would flash with animation, and his whole look and manner then would indicate the working of some purpose, incommunicable yet, because impossible to be successfully carried out.

Returning one day to their place of daily duty, after the short interval allowed about the hour of noon, and having prolonged their walk by passing along streets entirely unfrequented by them hitherto, the two young men were startled to perceive those streets almost filled with a confused multitude of expectant people, evidently waiting for the coming of some event which appeared exceedingly animating and interesting to all. Always delighted with anything which promised to vary the monotony of his daily existence, Arthur Hamilton rushed eagerly in amongst the crowd, inquiring on every hand—"what is it? what is it?" and hearing from all the not very satisfactory answer—"It's the trial, and they've won."

"What trial? and who has won?" asked Arthur, with more reason than patience; for each individual of that expectant crowd appeared to take it for granted that all the world was in full possession of the merits of the case, and of the relative position of the two parties at issue. Whether this was so with others or not, Arthur and his friend Arnold were certainly not amongst the initiated; and before their eager curiosity could obtain any satisfactory information, a shouting was heard in the adjoining street, which constituted one of the principal entrances to the town, followed by a rush amongst the people, and then the roll of rapid wheels, and the trampling of hoofs, while an open carriage with four horses came up, crowded



inside and out with gentlemen waving their hats in the air, and receiving the welcomes of the people with every demonstration of triumph, and delight.

Of course the idea of an election flashed across the minds of the two young men, rendered more probable by the appearance of the member for the county, holding a prominent place in the carriage, which indeed bore his own arms, and livery; but an election would have been known to all ranks and classes in the neighbourhood, while this affair appeared to be one of more limited and local interest.

“What is it?” said Arthur again, and he dashed in amongst the people with a half-formed determination to knock everybody down who would not explain to him the whole matter, and that in the fewest words possible; leaving his friend behind him standing quietly, and making his own silent observations, on a spot from whence he had the best possible view of the cavalcade; for the equipage was accompanied by outriders who bore the appearance of country gentlemen, and altogether it was evident that the exulting party were well supported by the wealth and aristocracy of the neighbourhood.

“There he is—that’s Dalrymple;” was uttered by many voices at once, as the carriage passed the spot where Arnold was standing; and following with his eye the indications of the speakers, he observed the figure of a tall gentlemanly-looking man standing in the front of the carriage, bowing, and waving his hand not ungracefully to the ladies at the open windows on each side of the street, and evidently recognising their cordial salutations as if conscious that the interest of the scene was centered in himself. As in many other cases of a similar nature, it is possible this consciousness extended a little too far;

for on the other hand, there was seated by his side, a young scion of nobility, then member for the county, who had not only supported Mr. Dalrymple during a long and tedious trial at the neighbouring county town, but who had previously rendered himself extremely popular while soliciting the "sweet voices" of the people of M——.

Arnold, however, was most attracted by the countenance and appearance of Mr. Dalrymple, a middle aged man of very striking exterior, with marks of thought upon his countenance, which all the joy and triumph of the present moment were not powerful enough to dissipate. He looked towards Arnold too. But no ; his glance was directed higher ; and, retreating a few paces, Arnold also looked up, and saw from the window of an adjoining house, a projecting balcony, in which a party of ladies were looking all delight and animation, scattering flowers, and waving handkerchiefs, and exhibiting every demonstration of the most cordial and flattering recognition.

All this transpired so rapidly, that Arnold had scarcely time to think, and even had his thoughts been more collected, they would at this moment in all probability have been dispelled by the form and face which absolutely *flashed* upon his sight, as it stood conspicuous amongst the group of ladies in the balcony. It was that of a dark-haired girl, just verging upon womanhood, dressed with the utmost simplicity, except that a broad sash of red—the colour adopted by the county member floated round her person, while a wreath of the same material was interwoven with her raven hair. But it was not the costume of this extraordinary looking girl, and most assuredly it was not her beauty, which attracted the deep wondering gaze of Arnold. It was the passionate wildness of her exulting look, as she leaned over the balcony and uttered

the word "father." Was it affection which found utterance in this simple but expressive word? Arnold wished it had been. He wished the girl had shrunk away abashed, and sensitive, or that she had sat alone and wept for very joy. No, it was not affection, but the outburst of a long pent up and trodden down ambition, now let loose for the first time, and shared, how deeply, with that one being, whom it seemed that chance alone had made her father—shared incommunicably, for they seldom spoke together, nor interchanged a single feeling except this, and this was not a fitting theme for words on either side.

Why should Arnold wish so much the girl had not stood flashing there, the very foremost, and as she necessarily must be, the most conspicuous, so that the mob shouted when they saw her, and threw up hats into the air, and vulgar compliments, until a blush came burning to her cheek, and still she flinched not; but stood laughing there, and the mob shouted more and more to see her look so wild and gipsy-like; until at last she raised her handkerchief, for even her bold spirit was abashed. Arnold thought her hand was shaking—at least he hoped so, and perhaps he had not been mistaken, for the ladies closed around her; but not before the handkerchief had fallen, slowly fluttering—fluttering—Oh! what a rush there was to catch it! Had a princess dropped her jewelled ring, the strife had scarcely been greater. Right and left the people elbowed one another. Huge red hands were grasping in the air, and still the light material floated, showing, ah, too plainly, it was a fabric of no queenly texture, for there were rents—nay, more than one—no matter. Arnold caught the treasure, and hid it in his bosom, almost at the peril of his life. So much for popular excitement wanting something to expend itself upon.



Having gained the disputed prize—precious in proportion as it was disputed—Arnold, as he turned leisurely away, very naturally took out the handkerchief, to ascertain whether it bore any mark or name, when that of Dorothy Dalrymple, imprinted at one corner, met his eye.

“A strange name,” said Arnold to himself, as he quietly folded up the handkerchief, “and a stranger girl. Who can she be?”

Anxious and curious to ascertain this fact, his ear was all the more alive to catch what every one around him said in reference to the flattering pageant which had so lately occupied the attention of the now idle and dispersing crowd; and coming up to a little knot of knowing-looking personages, Arnold lingered on the footpath near them long enough to hear the following conversation.

“I’m glad they have won,” said one man, “for the sake of our party.”

“It will be the making of that Dalrymple,” observed another.

“What is he?” asked a third.

“An engineer,” replied the second speaker.

“Then he *did* build the bridge right, after all,” exclaimed another member of the coterie.

“They’ve won the cause,” repeated the first; “that’s all I know about the matter; but it must be right too, for if they had lost, we should all have been thrown out of work, and the road would never have been carried that way at all, but Thompson and his men would have got it.”

The fact was, that Mr. Dalrymple, since the reader’s first acquaintance with him, had so far risen in the world, as to have been intrusted with some public works, tending greatly to the improvement of an estate belonging to the member for the county, and equally advantageous to other

gentlemen of landed property in the neighbourhood. As it seldom happens that any public improvement can be effected without private injury done in one quarter or another, so, in this case, an opposing party had arisen, the public works had been suspended; and, upon the principle of each for their own, the affair had been pushed on to so desperate a crisis, that men and women, families, households, societies, and corporations, had come to be at open warfare with each other, until the assizes, just at this time held, should decide the soul-absorbing point, whether a certain bridge, designed by Mr. Dalrymple, and built under his direction, had been erected a few inches too far upon a certain property, or not.

It was greatly to the interest of Mr. Dalrymple to make the most of himself in this business, come what would; and he possessed this great advantage for a pusher—that he had nothing to lose—that no decision of wise men, nor former precedent, nor quirk of law, nor final shake of learned wig, could make his fortune less propitious than it was before. Most truly, “the world was all *before*” him; and laying hold, with his accustomed tact and skill, of that most lucky chance of bringing himself before the world, Mr. Dalrymple became a hero to his own astonishment.

## CHAPTER XI.



N how many instances do kind caretakers of the young sacrifice the welfare of the mind to the health of the body. It has already been stated that the parents of Lucy Lee accepted with alacrity the proposal of Mr. Staunton to receive his granddaughter to that place in his home which had been left vacant by the removal of little Kate; and as days and weeks rolled by, and the girl improved in health, and the quiet family at the hall became accustomed and attached to her, it came to be tacitly understood that Lucy should remain, more especially as she appeared to fit into the situation with more entire adaptation than any one had done before. It is true she had not half the eagerness of her cousin Kate, in pursuing whatever her young heart was set upon, nor half the fearless determination in surmounting difficulties; but she had more pliancy of character, and a natural grace and gentleness in yielding, which rendered it almost a pleasure to herself.

Besides all which, Lucy was so beautiful. Neither delicacy of health, nor the thin, growing age to which she had attained, nor exposure to the summer's sun, nor any other of those rude circumstances incident to country life, appeared to tell with any other effect upon her, than that of



heightening her beauty by some added charm. There was in fact, no attitude which her slender figure could assume, but had its peculiar grace, nor one expression of her countenance which the beholder would not wish to come again. Perhaps the secret of all this might be found in her own sweet harmonious character, agitated by no contending passions, nor disturbed by emotions necessarily impelling towards different extremes. To perceive and to reflect were equally natural to her. She did both readily, but she did nothing of an intellectual nature in excess. She was no genius; but remained content to walk the pleasant paths of thought, without much effort, where other minds had gone before her, making few discoveries by the way. Her life was not an intellectual life. It was a life sustained by reverencing, loving, trusting others, not by being anything herself, but lowly-minded, fond, and true.

Bringing with her such a character to a beautiful and peaceful home, and living in an atmosphere of kindness, it was impossible for Lucy to be otherwise than happy. Indeed, the sweet harmony of her own soul was enough to make her happy always, without actual cause of grief; and hitherto her life had been so smooth and peaceful, that she scarcely knew what sorrow was, beyond a momentary terror of her father in his passionate moods. And even then, she often had the joy of soothing him, the rapture of throwing her soft arms around his neck, and feeling that he loved the pressure, and was calmed and cooled by it, and made a better and a happier man. Thus, if Lucy knew what sorrow was, she knew also what belonged to joy, and the infinite power of love. Perhaps it was a dangerous lesson for her to learn, leading her to think of love in the abstract, as always infinite, infallible, and self-sufficing.

However this might be with others, it was unquestionably so with her; and here, in the lone quietude of that antique and rural home, as years rolled on, and she grew up almost to womanhood, how should it have been otherwise? She had *nothing else*; and that strange fact itself has not unfrequently been accessory to the power and sovereignty of love. She had nothing else—no masters and few books—no duties, except those which it was far easier for her to fulfil than to neglect. Summer and winter, spring time and harvest, brought the only changes which particularly marked her lot. Yet she was happy, and went singing through the garden, gathering flowers to deck the old oak parlour, or sitting at her frame of curious work, which grew beneath her hand, to Margaret's infinite wonder and delight. For Lucy and her brother both were gifted with inventive powers, and clever hands to shape and fashion many things unheard of in the sampler days of old. Indeed, Arnold was a correct and beautiful draftsman; and the chief ground of his dissatisfaction in his father's office was, that he felt himself possessed of talents which never could be turned to any good account in his employment there.

Lucy had shared to some extent the same feeling; until, by lucky chance, she found a pleasant exercise for her invention in grouping flowers, and copying them in her humble and untaught manner; which, however, brought warm praises from her country friends; and thus, while pursuing her delightful task, she gained two most important points—pleasing herself and pleasing others, by the same effort.

Such were the simple but untiring pursuits with which Lucy managed to fill up her time, scarcely gaining one idea of any value, or adding to her store of knowledge a

single fact relating to the busy world, in which her nearest friends and relatives were moving. How could it be that Lucy never tired of her dull life, nor wore a discontented brow, nor let her frame drop from her hands with very listlessness of body and vacuity of mind? Ah! there was something ever sounding in her ear like far-off music, coming nearer, nearer, and so sweet! she sometimes hushed the very beating of her heart to listen to it.

We have said that from her early childhood Lucy loved her cousin, Frederick Ashley, as no other being loved him, seeing perfections in his character which none could see besides. Of course this fond attachment was a mere childish, blind, and foolish love, such as might easily have been dissipated had she mixed much in society, or found the opportunity of comparing him with other men. But just at the very time when reason dawned upon her mind, so far as to have enabled her to arrive at a true estimate of character, she was placed in a situation of comparative solitude, holding communion with nature in her rural aspect, far from the stir of busy life, and wanting all that strengthening, sharpening process of worldly discipline, which is apt to make so many characters the very opposite of hers—shrewd, keen, and calculating.

In such a situation, what could poor Lucy do but love? The impulse was already in her heart. Her homage was already paid to one, whom from her cradle she had thought the most beautiful and perfect of all human beings. One thing alone was wanting; and had she been an unprotected, penniless, orphan girl, it would have still been wanting. The late change in her circumstances, however, had made a wonderful difference in the behaviour of Frederick Ashley towards herself. Even his family had become attentive, courteous, and flattering, whenever they had the



opportunity of showing her attention ; and the undoubted attachment of their brother formed a theme of their frequent conversation, introduced with more ingenuity than delicacy of feeling.

Nothing is more easy than for officious friends to talk a young girl into the belief that she is beloved, even without the slightest shadow of evidence to support the fact. Indeed, say what we will in contempt of the idle chit-chat of empty minds, there is a power in gossip which the strongest are scarcely able to withstand ; more especially when a secret inclination is nourished and gratified by what is said. How often, for instance, is a juvenile authoress, knowing no world beyond the circle of a country village, persuaded by mere gossip to believe that her genius is a plant of glorious promise, budding into fame ! But of all circumstances, those which belong to the vulgar process of match-making are unquestionably most rife in false impressions, frauds, and vain imaginings of this kind.

Not that Lucy Lee was about to be victimised in this manner. She had her own evidence, as clearly understood as if conveyed in words ; for there is a process by which this mode of convincing can be carried on, and the lover not in any way committed. Would that some competent witness would write out, and publish to the world, the whole mystery of this process, by which a trusting, loving woman can be made to believe as confidently that she is beloved, as if an angel's voice had spoken it, without the necessity of any word to that effect being uttered ; so that, should other matters turn out favourably, the woman's heart is safe ; should they turn out unfavourably, her hand can be *unasked for*, and the man go free, to try his fortune where it better suits his fancy or his means.

And will no woman speak of this, and give the details

of her own deep grief? No; womanly pride and wounded delicacy will not let them speak; and so the thing goes on; and men know well they cannot—*will* not tell. They know well, too, that if they did, the world would turn upon them, as it mostly does, with nice discrimination, upon the weaker party; they know that even friends would turn upon them; above all, that women—their own sex, and sisters in suffering and weakness, would turn upon them, and rather blame them for their folly, than pity them for their deep wrong. And so the world goes on, in spite of moralizing upon its ways; and so it will go on, until each individual in it wears a conscience as tenacious of a *secret* sin as of a *public* stain.

Lucy, then, like thousands of her sex in similar circumstances, had her strong evidence, of which she could not speak. Much, too, of this evidence was charged upon her soul as secret. For instance, when her cousin Frederick came on pleasant summer evenings, leaving his horse at a neighbouring village, to stroll across the fields, and, wandering on towards the grounds at Hatherstone, would push aside the shrubs beside a certain tree which sheltered a rude seat, and then would stand before her in that green sequestered solitude, looking all smiles and happiness to find her there. Cousins as they were, and intimate from childhood, it seemed strange, in such a case, that secrecy should be either asked or wished for. But, taking into account the peculiarities of Mr. Staunton's character and disposition, it may be easily understood how neither Mrs. Ashley nor any of her family were particular favourites at the hall; the son, especially. Mr. Staunton declared he never could endure—"a greedy self-conceited boy!—what could he grow to be, as a man, but selfish and greedy still, with such a bringing-up?"

Nor was the old gentleman far wrong in his estimate of the true character of this most prosperous, and, as the knowing world of business still worded it, most *promising* young man. Frederick Ashley was evidently rising, and would rise. He had friends and admirers accordingly. He had invitations more than he could possibly accept; court paid to him beyond what he knew what to do with; and humble followers already, who were glad to take his snarling pleasantry without returning it in kind, because they felt as if the time was not far off when he might have places and employment to bestow.

Not that this prosperous young man cared much about popularity, simply as such; nor gave himself the slightest trouble to conciliate, except where something could be gained by doing so. His object was a single one; one generally accounted, not only lawful, but most praiseworthy. It was simply to get on—on, and not to be turned aside by anything that might retard his course.—On—on. His family were troublesome: he had too many sisters, always full of wants; a mother, teeming with suggestions as to what an only son, and only brother, ought to do; a father, never very prosperous, and lately rather sinking down the hill, than climbing up. All these things carefully considered, Frederick Ashley thought it time to wean himself a little from this family; not by open breach, or anything that could be made a grievance of; above all things, he studied to avoid a scene between his mother and himself, and sisters hanging round his neck, bedabbling his cravat with tears—these were the sort of things which Frederick Ashley from his youth had, on principle, eschewed; and, like his mother, being ready at expedients, he managed to bring about the long-desired separation without leaving any room or ground



for the slightest complaint of unkindness, or even suspicion of intentional neglect.

It was a lucky thing perhaps for all parties, that Frederick Ashley was very early placed in connexion with a most prosperous and wealthy man of business, who had few connexions of his own, and into whose favour and entire confidence the young man had had the art to introduce himself, before he had been an inmate of his office many months. Indeed there were unquestionable business talents in the youth, which no penetrating eye could well have overlooked ; and the method he had early adopted of pursuing the great object of his life—that of getting on, was, to do him justice, not a dishonest, but a prudent one. It consisted not in cheating others, but in making the most of every opportunity so as to turn it in favour of himself. Thus instead of being looked down upon by any fair young reader who may already have begun to dislike Frederick Ashley, he was in reality quite as worthy of her favour, as *many* of the fine gentlemen who already bask in the sunshine of her smiles.

Look at him, for instance, in his social capacity, and who can doubt his worth. Why there is scarcely the father of a large family in all the town of M——, who would not be delighted to see him at his table, any, or every day, and mothers—worthy mothers, who read long lectures to their daughters on their entrance into mixed society, make an exception on behalf of gentlemen of such known standing and propriety, as Mr. Frederick Ashley. The fact is, the young man is getting on, and reputably too.

All this, however, as may well be supposed, had nothing whatever to do with the affection of his cousin Lucy Lee. Had the very opposite been his situation, had poverty

steeped him "to the very lips," and neglect and ignominy been his portion, her love would only have been the more decided in its avowal, and the more devoted in its reality. Sometimes she almost wished—it was but for a moment—that he was poorer, or less prosperous, only that she might be more his equal; for now, she thought the worth, the dignity, the value, was all on his side; while she was the receiver of his kindness, and his favour—rich so far, but no farther. And then sometimes in the long shady walks of that lone garden, her wandering thoughts would venture so far as to a time when possibly she might be richer, and more worthy, as a match for him. But no; she never lingered here, nor could forgive herself for having harboured such an idea as that of benefiting by the death of any one, much more of him to whom she looked as to a protector, friend, and father.

All the overflowing gratitude of Lucy's heart was therefore kept in reserve, and hoarded for her bright future, for the blessed time when every day would be a day devoted to his happiness, when every serviceable act of her whole life would be for him, when every thought would centre in his good, and when every circumstance, so far as she could make it so, should be converted to his benefit, by pleasing his humour or gratifying his taste. Ah! what a glorious future did Lucy Lee shape out, as she sat fashioning her flowers, and giving them their varied tints and hues, more durable than those which glowed in the fancied colouring of her own fate.

It was soon after the first understanding on the part of the Ashley family, that Lucy had actually become a settled resident at Hatherstone, that Frederick went over in due form to call upon his grandfather, with messages from Mrs. Lee to her daughter, and pleasant tidings of the

health of absent friends, all which sounded very amiable and very sweet in Lucy's ear; and often after his first visit, she had remarked to Margaret—"How kind it was of him to come and tell me all about mamma;" to which expressions Margaret had replied with a degree of coldness and indifference, wholly unaccountable to her young companion.

As these visits were repeated, however, something more than coldness had manifested itself on the part of Mr. Staunton, and that so plainly at last, that the kind-hearted young gentleman, so officiously interested in carrying messages from one member of the family to another, found it wisest to break off this kind of communication altogether; and having for a considerable length of time confined himself to a mysterious kind of correspondence by letters, each of which set Lucy thinking, and castle-building, more, and more; although, for anything like a positive declaration of love which they contained, they might have been laid upon the king's highway, yet each being calculated to *elicit*, more than to *impart*, the period at length arrived, when a private interview was proposed, just as a mere boy and girl frolic, as he happened to be riding that way, and as the old gentleman was so eccentric and ill-natured as to prevent their meeting in the usual manner. There could be no harm in two cousins enjoying a garden walk together, to talk about family affairs; more especially, as he had lately seen Mrs. Lee and Arnold, and had something particular to speak about.

That private interview was a dangerous expedient, as private interviews in such cases almost invariably are. Lucy felt it to be a sort of bond between them—a secret link which could never be rent asunder. It gave him a power in fact, to ask for other interviews; and Lucy



looked more conscious and more beautiful each time. Not that he spoke of love. He only looked it, and talked of all those idle nothings which usually form the sum of lovers' conversation, when one or both are not in earnest. How different from an honourable manly declaration, and how easily might women, *if they would*, discern betwixt the two.

In spite of herself, and of all her prepossessions, Lucy felt dissatisfied and humbled every time she met her cousin in this private manner. Why did he wish to meet her thus? Her mother's messages, too, how often did they end in nothing. And then she thought it was not right. She would not meet him there again. She would go home, and see him in her father's house, or not at all. All these sage questionings, and sager resolutions, occupied the doubting girl for one short week at least, after each interview; but as the days rolled on, and time grew dull and heavy, and walking there alone grew also sad and solitary, then she thought again they were but cousins, and he so excellent a character, approved, admired by all, so delicate and gentle to herself—where could the harm be? Then a letter came again, and evening with its dewy calm, and Lucy would go once more to that shady spot, if only just to tell him they must never meet again in secret.

It was with such thoughts as these, that Lucy wandered forth one evening, about the period of her history on which we have already entered. Feeling that if not exactly right, she could not yet be very wrong, there was a cheerful smile upon her face, which, when she met her cousin, and innocently told him what she said she came to tell, gave but too true a contradiction to her words, and assured him, far more plainly than any spoken language could have done, how small would be the difficulties to

overcome in meeting her again. A pleasant little subject for jest and banter, was that resolution of Lucy's, and it was nothing more, nor likely to be in such a case. On this evening, however, the conversation with her cousin went something farther than it had ever done before. Hitherto he had carefully sifted her, though always under cover of a joke, as to her influence with her grandfather; often complimenting her, of course, upon the magic of her smiles, and wishing he was the old gentleman himself. Now he began to venture farther, and even asked the wondering girl how far she was prepared to go to please her grandfather.

"I cannot tell," said Lucy, with the utmost simplicity. "I only know it is the study of my life to please him; and so it ought to be while I live here."

"Unquestionably," observed her companion; "in all things reasonable. But suppose, for instance, he should set his heart upon your marrying a plough-boy?"

Lucy could only laugh, and protest against her grandfather ever doing anything so absurd.

"I am not joking," replied Frederick Ashley; "although the plough-boy is perhaps an exaggerated case. But suppose, now, you had a fancy of your own—women have strange fancies sometimes—and wished to marry some one not approved by this old grandfather of ours. Would you do so?"

"Not while I remained a member of his household."

"What would you do, then?"

"I would go home, and abide only by my father's and my mother's wishes."

"What! and leave all the broad lands of Hatherstone to find another mistress?"

"Oh yes. That would not cost me a single thought—

not even if I knew they were to be my own, which I do not, at present. Indeed I never think about them, and for myself, should be far happier to be left with nothing, than with all."

"Child! Never talk to me so foolishly. You must not throw away your lucky chances thus. Think of your family."

"I do think of them often; and it is more for their pleasure, than my own, that I stay here so long and willingly."

"Well, then, I'll give you a little sage advice, not the less valuable for being what you call a trifle worldly. You are very young Lucy."

"Yes, very young, and very foolish; and often sadly wanting some one to advise me."

"So much the more need, then, for what I am about to say. It is impossible, dear Lucy, that beauty such as yours should long remain unseen, untalked of, unsought. Besides which, the fact of your residing here gives every one the idea, whether true or false, that you are the future heiress of this property; for all the world acquainted with the oddities of old Michael Staunton, is pretty well assured that neither your parents nor mine are likely to enjoy many of his tender mercies. You therefore, will become an object of greater interest and attention than you are at all prepared to expect. It behoves you, therefore, to think beforehand, how you would act in case of any sudden turn in your affairs or prospects. You know what I allude to."

"And what if I have thought, Frederick?"

"Perhaps, Lucy, I have no right to ask you to what purpose you have thought. I am only your cousin—the companion of your childhood—the friend with the strong



arm, who used to protect you from danger. You need a strong arm yet sometimes, Lucy. Is it not so?"

"Ah Frederick! sadly—sadly. Margaret tells me if I would pray, and read my bible, I should need it less; and sometimes I do try a little while. But then I am so happy Frederick—so grateful to everybody, especially to you; so full of joy, I know not what to do, without a friend to tell me. It seems to me almost that I have wings, and could fly up to heaven."

"No, no, Lucy. You are an angel, that we all know; but you must not fly away from *me*, though you have from the subject I was talking about."

"Ah! yes, I recollect. What was it you were wanting me to tell you?"

"Not to tell me, so much as to promise me something, Lucy. Will you, if I dare to ask it?"

"Yes, anything, provided it is not wrong."

"Will you, then, promise me, dear Lucy, that if ever any man presumes to speak to you of love, you will let me know before you give him the least reason to think you will listen to him?"

"Yes; most assuredly I will, dear Frederick; and I should have done so, had you never asked me."

"Would you, dearest Lucy? You make me so happy when you tell me so."

"Do I, Frederick? Do I—*Can* I make you happy?"

"Inexpressibly happy, Lucy. Happier than I have been for months, and years!"

Lucy had been standing before her cousin, idly playing with the waving sprays, and plucking leaves from the overhanging boughs, while he extended his graceful figure upon a rustic seat beside her; but as he said this, she turned towards him, and first fixing her soft earnest eyes upon his

face, as if to penetrate the meaning of his words, gave up, too soon, alas! that prudent search, and yielding to the trust of her own credulous heart, sunk meekly down upon her knees before him; while, with clasped hands and downcast look of maiden modesty, she breathed a vow so solemn, that her lips turned pale as marble, and her whole appearance wore the aspect of a gentle form inspired with some strong feeling, almost more than human in its intensity, and depth.

Even he, the man of worldly calculations, was startled for a moment out of his accustomed self-possession. He could not answer. The natural power of a pure, single, and devoted soul was all too much for him; and had he listened to his guardian angel at that golden moment of his life, the tear which trembled in his eye had not been dashed away for ever.



*The man and the woman*





## CHAPTER XII.



NOT to a family whose plans and movements were turned by such complicated wheels as those which worked the domestic machine under Mrs. Ashley's guidance, was it possible for years to roll over, without being marked by events of deep interest and importance, to the mother and the daughter, if not to all the world.

In these events, the father of the family, according to his accustomed habits, took but little part. Perhaps the secret reason was, that he had others of a more pressing nature urgently demanding his attention. We have said already that Mr. Ashley was an amiable and gentlemanly man; but this description conveys but a faint idea of his natural goodness, his kindness of heart, his affection for his family, and his incapability of being driven by trial or vexation to revenge his own sufferings upon others. Thus, he was much less accustomed to question the right of his wife and his daughters to meddle with and manage everything around them—himself into the bargain—than to remember what a plentiful and peaceful home Mrs. Ashley had left to dwell with him; how many household cares she had since endured; and finally, how he had once loved her

in their early days, when they rambled in the green lanes of Hatherstone together. Yes, he had loved her too well then, to deserve to be a slighted man at this stage of the journey of life; only that his love, like too many precious gems, had remained but little valued in its casket, locked up, and seldom looked at; while the world, as usual, and women in particular, wherever there were real hearts to be found, were busy offering them in exchange for empty caskets, which never had contained, or could contain, a gem so precious.

But we shall better understand the Ashley family, by looking in upon them on the occasion of one of their events—their premeditated events; for they had a way of seeing things beforehand, and knowing exactly how things would turn out, not quite peculiar to themselves. Mr. Ashley being somewhat of a favourite, and his circumstances just now claiming our deepest sympathy, we will visit him in his den, or place of business; and first, we miss the ancient matron from her accustomed fireside corner. The dreamy chair is vacant, and the apartment altogether looks neglected, and not half so habitable as it once did. The dinner comes up too, served in an inferior manner; and the unwashed hands which place it on the table make it infinitely worse. The harassed weary man, for whom it is prepared, however, seldom speaks of that. His habit lately has been to let things take their course, so far, at least, as comfort was concerned; and as to eating, the servant wonders what can be amiss, for master sometimes sends his steak away almost untouched—"so beautifully *done*, too."

However this may be with the more substantial viands, the same cannot be said of the wine. Of late it seems to have done double duty; only that to-day being Mrs. Ashley's



favourite anniversary, he has promised to return home early, to dine with his wife and children, and therefore he is more abstemious than usual; but if there ever was a time when wine, or some strong stimulant, was absolutely necessary, it might seem to be so on this particular morning. Mr. Ashley has had letters—he has been very anxious about letters lately—and his hand shakes dreadfully as he breaks one seal after another. Let us watch him while he reads. His hair has grown thin upon the top of his head, indeed all over, and having ceased to curl, stands out a little here and there, just raised and separated by the old habit of drawing his fingers through it, learned, no doubt, when there were masses of rich curls to play with. He is not thin, but yet his cheeks are hollow, and there is a fallen look about the lower part of his countenance, as if he had once been twice the size he is now, and yet he never was. His brow is broken into many wrinkles, and his eye looks glassy and almost sightless, needing spectacles, for which he has already begun to fumble, as if with fingers' ends slightly benumbed; and when he reads his daily paper, which he does always after dinner, he has large magnifying glasses, through which he struggles to see clearly how the world is going. To day, however, as he does not dine, and only takes his biscuit and one glass, or two, so neither does he read his daily news. In short, he seems to have other things to read; and sits like one enchanted, with those letters in one hand, the other now and then employed in wiping his hot brow, on which great drops are standing; and yet the day is cool, and summer's sun has never lighted up that room. The man is surely struggling with an ague fit, for now his teeth are chattering as with winter's cold. What can it be? Alternate shiverings, and rushings of red heat, and

brow so tight as if an iron band were round his head ! Speak out, poor sufferer ! Thou art one to whom a word of soothing would be doubly dear at such a time. But no ; he has no human soul to share with him the long accumulated burdens which oppress his own. Speak out, poor man, for there is one to hear thee, even if thy wife will not ; and this great agony is all too much for such an one as thou art—so patiently forgetful of thyself, so gentle-spirited, so glad to help a suffering brother, if help were in thy power.

“No ; I will not tell them yet,” said Mr. Ashley ; “things may mend.” He said this in a voice, half-sigh half-groan, and no ear heard it but his own, for he was all alone. Poor man ! he had been thinking the same thing for years—that things would mend ; and now he had at least one reason for a growing conviction that they would ; inasmuch, as they appeared to be approaching nearer, month by month, to that particular point from whence, according to the laws of nature, there could be no further descent. The Ashleys, however, were not a family likely to be involved in any terrible or ruinous catastrophe, come what would. Mr. Ashley himself had never been a speculator. He had begun the world by entering upon his father’s well-established business, which, but for some gradual changes in political and mercantile affairs, might still have supported him in the comfortable dignity of a man of business of the highest respectability.

Mr. Ashley’s respectability, indeed, no slanderous tongue had ever touched. His own affable and easy manners, his absence of all unfounded assumption, his love of peace and comfort, and his universal goodwill, if they did not obtain him real friends, had, at all events, the effect of preventing him from having bitter enemies ; and thus, so far as society

was concerned, he passed pleasantly along, holding the place his father held at corporation dinners, and in all things reputable and seemly, rather maintaining long-accustomed ground, than advancing one step forward. Amongst his brethren of the town council, and the set of old friends he was accustomed to eat his turtle-soup and drink his wine with, he had no ambition to stand foremost. Distinction was not the star he worshipped, nor was an onward course the object of his life; at least beyond the possibility of taking old friends with him.

But while Mr. Ashley was so rare a person as to make himself extremely comfortable about advancing; while he was rather satisfied and pleased to remain stationary in the safe but honourable position which his father had filled before him; and while he lived, and flourished, and enjoyed life here, untroubled by ambitious thoughts of working his way higher in the social scale, he was, perhaps, of all men living, one of the least calculated to endure a fall. Thus, when other men were hurrying on in the race of business, past and over one another, trampling the very life out of their fallen fellows in their hot strife and eager battle after more and more of—none could tell his brother nor himself of *what*—the peaceful soul of this one man remained unmoved. He could not join the conflict: the necessary consequence was, the world passed on, and left him; and now that one thing, of all others, which his character was least fitted to sustain, seemed threatening to come upon him. In short, Mr. Ashley began to feel strong symptoms of sinking. His worldly foundation was becoming less secure. Each passing year the profits he realised were smaller than the year before; and while he was still far from owing more than he could honourably pay, his affairs had long since passed that stage when



it would have been possible to retire from business altogether, and maintain his family in comfort.

“ If I had but given up in time, and been contented !” Mr. Ashley used to say, as he pondered these sad thoughts ; but he only said so to himself, within the walls of that dark room, where, in the winter, he would sit dreaming over the ashy fire, half-dozing, with his bottle and his glass, and almost dreading the sound of those swift wheels that rolled him to his villa, and placed him in that boasted centre of all happiness—the bosom of his family.

Whether this spot of all others was the centre of happiness to Mr. Ashley, we shall be better able to decide after taking note of the preparations which were made that day to render it one of more than usual felicity, seeing it was the anniversary of that auspicious event which had placed him in the enviable position of being Mrs. Ashley’s husband. Pity those ill-timed letters should have arrived on such a day ! Pity, too, that Mr. Ashley was a man who could not quite command himself—a soft-hearted man, to whom a word of unaccustomed kindness sometimes went like a sharp arrow, making the tears start to his eyes : sure signal that, for the wife and daughters to pounce upon him, for they found him manageable then.

On the present occasion there was much to be accomplished through this weakness. Many contingencies were to hang upon that dinner ; and Mrs. Ashley, like a skilful general, marshalled her forces accordingly. It was not to be an elaborate dinner. Mr. Ashley was no epicure ; and of late, especially, he had questioned whether the table would not look quite as comfortable, if less expensively supplied. He was, therefore, to have one joint remarkable for its simplicity, dressed with the nicest calculation as to time and method, just as Mr. Ashley always said, with

somewhat of fond remembrance, he had once eaten at Hatherstone, in his days of courtship; but, somehow or other, nothing ever did taste like those dishes now.

Early that morning the mother and the daughters were all on the alert, for now they were true help-meets to that excellent lady, in every sense of the word. In order that the domestic machine might work more harmoniously, and because, as they grew up to womanhood, they ceased to be very manageable as mere puppets in her plans, these hopeful young ladies had lately been admitted more into their mother's confidence than formerly; a post of honour which they were not very likely to disgrace, so long as there was anything to be gained by keeping it.

Kate Staunton, still a member of the Ashley family, was the only rebel under this system of good management. On such occasions of family consultation, where an object had to be gained by underhand or questionable means, Kate was decidedly impracticable; and so often had her rashness, in fearlessly betraying the honest truth, when everything depended upon its being kept back or disguised, frustrated plans which the family had been long in concocting, that, but for the solid advantages accruing from her residence at the Villa, there is little doubt but the orphan child, once the subject of such tender consideration, would long ere this have been returned to her grandfather, without much ceremony attending her departure.

But it is high time that Mrs. Ashley's great object, as regards her daughters, was explained. That object was educational. Mrs. Ashley understood this, if she understood anything; and, unlike those maudlin misses, who only knew how to dance and dress their hair, her daughters, she determined, should be educated—really *well*

educated. In pursuance of this plan, some of the five had now been subject to the enlightening process for the space of twenty years ; always attending lectures—always having masters in attendance upon them—always running after some new method of improvement, and paying for it at the highest price. The wonder is, they being five in number, very ingenious, and money not too plentiful, that it did not, once in their whole lives, occur to one of them, how far it might be possible to *improve themselves*.

This notion, however, had it even been suggested to the Ashley family, would have been instantly put down as a homely idea, quite too antiquated to be harboured in a modern brain. It is most probable the idea never did arise in any one of their sapient minds ; for they seemed all agreed, cost what it would, that the great thing to be done was, to go on improving—improving in foreign languages, living and dead—improving in history and chronology, in mathematics and general science, in physics and metaphysics, and last, but not least, in drawing, and in music, vocal and instrumental. All this was well ; the world appears to think it could not have been better, seeing that the Misses Ashley had no time to mend their stockings, nor yet to chat beside the winter's fire, when their father came home tired and vexed with business—no time to sing to him his favourite songs, nor to cut open the leaves of his magazine, nor to do any of those little nameless kindnesses which help to repay the labours of parental love—the long watchings and waitings upon helpless infancy, and all the tenderness, solicitude, and care, which fill up the existence of those who love their children as they ought.

Mrs. Ashley, as well as her daughters, had a very fine sense of what would be likely to advance their improve-

ment. Not a lecturer came to the town but their names stood first on the list of subscribers. Not a new method of painting was offered to the attention of the ladies, but they were the first to form a class. But especially, in the musical department, the higher the pretender, the more determined were they to receive instruction from that particular fountain head. If in the course of their visiting, Mrs. Ashley discovered that any young ladies surpassed her own in the common qualifications for evening display—and such unfortunately was too frequently the case, her great business then was to find out from whom they had received instruction, and if possible, so to manage that her daughters should receive the same.

“After all,” observed Mr. Ashley to his wife, sometimes, “the girls don’t take;” and he even ventured so far as to suggest that some other method should be tried; but he was always so confidently assured that the sole cause why his daughters were not more popular amongst the gentlemen, was that they wanted the touch of one master, and the style of another, both which were absolutely indispensable to their success in life, that he had learned, as in almost every other household question, to let things take their course; and so the master was engaged, the lessons gone through, and the young ladies remained just as plain, and as far from being entertaining or attractive, as before.

About the time here alluded to, a celebrated Italian music master had come to reside for a short time in the town of M——. The very name—Valdoni, made it almost imperative upon all young ladies who wished to be considered as playing with feeling, as well as execution, to take lessons of him. His terms were high; but so, it was said of him, were his birth and talents; to say nothing of his per-



sonal recommendations, which no doubt greatly enhanced the reputation of his skill as a musician. In short, Valdoni was the fashion, and the Misses Ashley, like their neighbours, must have the benefit of his lessons.

To obtain permission from papa, had been for some time the great object of the female part of the family ; and on this day in particular, a scene was to be enacted which they had little doubt would produce the desired effect. Great consultations, and even some slight rehearsals had previously been gone through, in order that the different parts might be better sustained ; until Kate Staunton, who never liked her aunt and cousins so little as on these occasions, grew quite sad at heart, and went up into her little attic, where the happiest portion of her life was spent, determined to bury her thoughts in some interesting book, in order that she might neither hear nor see what was going on.

From the frequency with which Kate repaired to this small chamber, and the satisfaction with which she always climbed the narrow stairs by which it was approached, one might almost have fancied that a mine of wealth had been discovered there. And so in fact there had been—a mine of more than gold—a mine of knowledge derived from books, of which there was abundance, piled in heaps around the room ; and that far deeper knowledge, derived perhaps from silent thought, and self-examination, and often thwarted will ; with many a secret trial, not unsalutary, though so closely shut within the inmost sanctuary of her young heart.

Had Kate been the pampered child of fortune, with every wish indulged, it is more than probable she would neither have been happy herself, nor capable of adding much to the happiness of others. As it was, the discipline she so much needed, had not only tried but purified her

heart ; and as her mind expanded, and her eager quest for knowledge found supply, her character, and even her countenance, assumed so different an aspect, that her early friends would not have recognised her for the widow's child. Instead of that little, indescribable looking creature, so unattractive, and so plain in the opinion of common observers, Kate was now an interesting, intelligent looking girl, not beautiful, but possessing what is understood by a *good countenance*, and that in the highest sense of the expression ; a countenance that looked an honest welcome, while it drew the good and wise beside it—an earnest countenance, too—one that, if she asked a question, was sure to elicit some intelligent, and often deeply interesting reply ; for while so many sparkling looks grow dull and vapid during the progress of any serious and improving conversation, Kate grew more and more enlightened ; her strongly marked but clearly pencilled eye-brows, so regularly formed, would then be slightly arched, while her grey eyes looked almost black, so brightly were they then illuminated. Not that Kate was by any means habitually on the stretch to urge on conversation beyond what was perfectly natural and easy. So far from this, she was a great lover of a little quiet badinage and fun ; and often in the social visiting of the Ashleys, when Arthur Hamilton was of the party, Kate would subject herself to Mrs. Ashley's stern reproof, for lightness of behaviour towards gentlemen—an odious charge, and wholly undeserved by Kate in general. The fact was, she had a trick, her aunt and cousins said, of always keeping this young gentleman to herself—*unwillingly*, on his part, they believed ; to which poor Kate would very naturally answer, —“ then why does he not go ? ”

“ Now girls,” was Mrs. Ashley's frequent exclamation

as she mustered her forces on the morning of that pleasant anniversary. "Now girls, remember what I say to you. If your father asks for music, take him by surprise with one of those old Scotch ballads. Let me see, what have you? He used to like 'Roy's wife.' Can you find it, Charlotte? Now I think of it, I've a great mind to sing something myself."

"Oh! do, mamma," was echoed by the five.

"A bright thought," continued Mrs. Ashley, "I'll sing 'John Anderson my Jo.' Don't laugh, girls. Papa likes it above all things; and I *could* sing it once. He'll forgive me, I know, if I break down, for the sake of the old ditty; only don't smile on any account. That would spoil all."

"And what shall I do, mamma?" inquired Miss Jane.

"Where are your slippers?" asked the lady mother.

"What slippers, mamma?"

"The slippers you worked for him when we were hoping to get you off to Brighton, with the Twisseldons."

"Oh! don't you know that cook has been wearing one of them, with her bad foot."

"Never mind. Bring them here to me. We'll plump them up a little, and place the best upon the other. Papa never sees that kind of thing. He *is* nearly blind, poor man! There, put them near the fender. Now they don't look so bad."

"Is there anything else we can do, mamma?" asked the young lady who had been so successful with the slipper. Mrs. Ashley glanced around the room, and then exclaimed—"The chair—the arm-chair, out of the library. Papa will be quite delighted to see how we have been thinking about him. And now, girls, if he should enter upon any of his old stories ——"

"Are we really to endure that?" exclaimed the voices.

"Yes, most assuredly," replied the mother; "and not to yawn, nor put him out, nor go away and leave him."

An universal groan announced their acquiescence with these directions. And this father was the very same who, in their fretful infancy, had often held them to his heart, and borne them with untiring arms, as he paced to and fro, on long winter nights, hushing their cries, and lulling them to sleep; and pacing still the narrow limits of his chamber, with step so gentle that it could not break the slumbers of the other loved ones there; this was the very same father, whose stories they were charged, for especial purposes of their own, to hear, and not to crush them in the telling—them, and their father's spirit with them!

But hark! He comes: it is the man himself, looking more worn and haggard than his wont, and strangely occupied about those letters.

"Papa—papa!" Oh, what a brisk and cheering echo did that word make now, as the sweet voices uttered it! "Papa, let me take off your coat. I do believe it rains: you must be wet. Here are your slippers—*my* slippers, dear papa—the pair I worked for you myself."

"Any news to-day, my love?" asked Mrs. Ashley; and the kind lady, as she spoke, put on a look of interest most profound, such as made her husband sorry he had neglected to read the daily paper, almost for the first time in his life. Indeed his whole family, to his infinite astonishment, assumed unwonted attitudes of attention and respect: if he seemed to want anything, they ran hither and thither, even anticipating his wishes; and, altogether so pleasant an air was thrown over his domestic affairs, that inwardly the man of troubled soul began to feel as



if those letters, followed up by others, worse and worse—nay, even the actual wreck of all his worldly substance, would be *nothing*, could he always have such welcomes in his home.

“ Well, this *is* comfortable,” said the father, sinking down into his favourite chair. To tell the truth, he did not know exactly what to make of his reception, at first. Certain recollections, not easily obliterated, warned him that his domestic scenes had sometimes danger in them, when they looked like this ; but no sooner had he settled himself into his favourite chair, than a pleasant sense of its reality, at least, crept round his heart ; and he began to think that other things might possibly be *real* too. Perhaps it was a *real* heart-warm welcome. Half believing this, and more than half bewildered with the novelty of such belief, the father looked around upon his family as he had seldom looked of late.

“ I’ll tell you what, my girls,” said he,—“ and you, good wife,—I don’t know what to make of all this fuss ; but yet I am quite content to take it kindly. I’ll tell you something else—that never miserable wretch was more in need of kindness than I have been this blessed day ; and now it comes upon me, I don’t know how to bear it, such an old fool am I.”

As he said this, he drew his arm around one daughter’s waist, and leaned his brow upon another’s arm, his hot tears falling on her dress the while. Out of six women—five daughters and a wife, there was not one whose purpose was the least trifle shaken by this evident weakness ; but, instead, there were knowing glances interchanged, sharp, calculating looks, and shrugs and nods, as if they counted up one lesson from Valdoni for every tear their father shed.

And then the dinner came, with that choice dish, and talk of Hatherstone in the old times, when both the sisters and their brother were at home, and courtship made the place a paradise. It was long enough since Mr. Ashley had heard his wife so much as speak on themes like these; but now, to dwell on them with interest!—it took her back, in his astonished eyes, to youth and beauty, and to all he once believed she was. But the wine, too; how kind it was of her to think of that old dozen, stowed away—so choice, and now so welcome! There seemed to be no need for her to sing “John Anderson my Jo;” for, even now, his heart was melting fast; and while dessert was yet upon the table, one young girl had thrown her arms around his neck, one was mixing for him strawberries and cream, a third was cutting open for him the leaves of his magazine, a fourth was looking out her old Scotch ballads, to be ready for him in the drawing-room, and a fifth was bitterly complaining that she never could be “near papa;” while the chief enchantress sat apart, watching the working of her spells, in secret; but aloud declaring, in a voice of mimic wrath, that she herself was nothing when “papa came home.”

But the heart grows sick with details such as these. Enough to say, the pageant passed—the scene was acted well—the point was gained. And now the father sits alone, left in the dining-room to drink his wine, and chew the cud of sweet or bitter fancy. Which was it? Not much of either beams forth from his drowsy eye. Musing, and dizzy, and bewildered, there he sits; while bursts of laughter, only half-suppressed, are sounding in the drawing-room, announcing triumph *there*. Musing, and dizzy, and half-drunken, there he sits alone. Their point is gained; why should they stay with him?

Musing, and dizzy, and half drunken—oh what thoughts come back ! The weary and bewildered man has gone far, far into the olden time. He is so faint, so weak, so overborne and crazed with many cares, his heart is yearning even for his mother—his old mother, who had one simple purpose all her life—just to make him happy. Oh for a touch of her kind hand—a tone of her soft voice, for that was always true. His parents and old Michael Staunton had been friends together ; and the days he spent with them at Hatherstone had been the happiest of his life. There was a reality in all things then ; but now the world was grown so slippery, he knew not what to make of it. Sometimes he felt as if its present aspect was but a dream, the past his only true existence ; and the more he drank of that bewildering wine, the more he felt as if it was so.

Thus, then, he sat and mused—it was his habit, no one caring to interrupt his thoughts ; thus he sat and drowned the anguish of his mind, the tender, yearning memories of the past, and all the fearful apprehensions of the future, which at times he dared not meet. He was a man who had no thought of bitterness towards any human being. Even at the worst, he never blamed his wife and children ; but took for granted much of what they told him of the *reasonableness* of all their wants, and how they were the same as other people's—as *good* people's too ; a fact which would have needed more philosophy than his, entirely to gainsay. He only felt the weight, the burden of his rapidly increasing cares, unshared by any one ; and in his early waking hours, and when the time drew near for letters to be laid upon his desk—those were the moments when he sunk with all the weakness of a child ; and often scalding tears, unseen by any one,

rolled down his shrivelled cheek ; and his white hand so fumbled with those ominous papers, that he scarcely had the power to break their seals.

At such times—nay, at every season of his life, at every moment, whether of trust or trial, of bright hope or bitter disappointment, Mr. Ashley was a man whom woman's influence might have made or *unmade*. Of all the ills of life, no single one, nor even many, hard and bitter had they been, could ever have completely overwhelmed him, had some woman, loving and beloved, stood faithfully beside him ; walking along with him through sorrow or through shame, and strengthening him for better things. Are there not other Mr. Ashleys struggling on alone?—Mothers and daughters, with your many wants and wishings, look around you. But softly!—even here a gentle step is coming.

“Uncle, dear uncle,” said a kind soft voice, so earnest that it made the dreamer start. It seemed to him as if a phantom form had spoken in a vision. “Uncle, don't let them have those lessons,” said the same voice, while a soft cool hand was laid upon his forehead, and a cheek pressed gently to his own, and with the other of those loving hands his half-emptied glass was pushed away. It was Kate Staunton who did this—kind, faithful Kate—who could not have entertained a fonder, deeper affection for Mr. Ashley, had he been her father.

Kate had known all about this plan of Mrs. Ashley's ; and, but for that unwonted reception of the husband and parent, would have made a point of seeing her uncle alone, for the purpose of preparing him for what was going to happen. In the acting out of the plan she had not been present, only so far as attendance at the dinner-table required her to be so ; for her spirit could not brook that



kind of thing; and having no influence to put it down, her only alternative was, as usual, to withdraw. She was not, therefore, acquainted with the fact, that the point was really gained, until her uncle told her, in reply to her reiterated remonstrances with him to rouse his manly spirit, and refuse that most unreasonable demand upon his purse.

"It is too late, my child," said Mr. Ashley, in a voice made womanly with wine and weakness. "They have come over me again, as they always do. I could have borne their kindness—they have tried that trick too often; but that talk about old times! Oh, Kate! whenever you are married, treat your husband openly, honestly; don't make a fool of him, as your aunt does of me."

"No, uncle, you are not a fool. Nobody can say that of you; only sometimes when you have taken too much wine. It is that, more than anything, which unmans you, and makes you unable to withstand their arguments and persuasions. Don't take any more, to-day, dear uncle. You shall have your coffee; that will do you more good. Let us go into the library together—not the drawing-room just now. See, I have got the last number of the story that you liked so much. Shall I read it to you, while you drink your coffee?"

In the earnestness of her entreaties, Kate had unintentionally sunk upon her knees beside her uncle, looking affectionately into his face; and while his hand was resting on her head in very fondness and endearment, it seemed to bring back to his recollection former times, when fondness found a welcome from his own children, warmer and more real than it ever found now. At last he said, with sadness in his tone—"Oh! Kate! I loved them so, when they were babies."

"They were nice little babies, I dare say," said Kate;

"I am sure they must have been. And Frederick—what a fine fellow he was, was he not?"

"Frederick!" exclaimed the father, with every tone of tenderness now gone.—"Don't talk of him. Do you know Kate, it was but yesterday I asked him for the loan of fifty pounds, and what do you think he did?"

"Perhaps he *could not* lend it," whispered Kate; but her uncle shrugged his shoulders, with a look of unbelief; and finding that the conversation had taken a dangerous turn, and that Mr. Ashley was looking about for his glass in order that he might replenish it, Kate so managed as to lead him away into the library without his being aware of any extraordinary effort on her part. Here she had ordered the chairs to be replaced, and as coffee was immediately brought in, there was at least an appearance of outward comfort, contributing its share to soothe the irritation and suffering within.

As the two sipped their coffee, Kate went chattering on as if from very joy and buoyancy of heart. It was a summer's evening, the air hot, and heavy, and she threw open the low window which looked out upon a pretty lawn. The moon was shining, and the dew gave freshness to the air, and odour to the flowers. Mr. Ashley drew his chair beside the open window to look with Kate upon that scene, and they were both silent. It seemed as if the tumult of their feelings was subdued; and then, if ever in her life, the orphan girl looked up to heaven with prayerful spirit, asking aid for one who needed it so sorely—who was himself so weak, so sad, so broken-spirited.

At last she spoke, and said in simple language,—“Oh uncle! would it not be happy to feel assured that we should go to heaven, and be at rest for ever?”

Mr. Ashley started. “What do you mean, Kate,” he

said, " by talking to me in that manner ? You don't think I am breaking up, surely ? "

" No uncle, most assuredly I don't mean that ; but sometimes you come home so faint and weary, and you look so much as if you wanted rest. "

" Rest, child. I don't know what it is, and have not for some time. There is no rest for me. "

" Yes there is, uncle—sweet, unbroken rest. But we must pray for it—watch for it—strive for it. "

" Ah, Kate ! it is all very well to talk as you do ; and what you say is gospel truth, no doubt ; but I have never thought about these things, nor cared much either ; and I cannot do so now. "

## CHAPTER XIII



WHILE endeavouring to interest our readers, and the young in particular, on behalf of Kate Staunton, some apology is due to those who look for the accustomed attributes of a heroine, in every female character commended especially to their favourable notice. To say nothing of doubts early entertained, and which experience has done little to remove, whether characters endowed with such attributes are often actually found; we would speak with all diffidence, and submission to public opinion, while suggesting another doubt, whether, if found, they would really interest us to the degree which is taken for granted by the writers of fiction, who have the privilege of inventing characters of their own. It may prove a great want of taste to entertain or give utterance to sentiments of this kind, but we have to confess, that often in the perusal of well-told fiction, we have turned with pleasure to the subservient characters—to the wayward, the erring, the passionate, or the perverse—we have turned even to the less lovely, the less elevated, and the less perfect, with a degree of sympathy and acquaintanceship, which had failed to be



inspired by the heroine herself, and which, we are inclined to suspect, is not often inspired by characters, who, whatever their attractions may be, are not at the same time weak and faulty as ourselves.

If the reader should be of an opposite opinion, requiring all possible perfections without shadow or alloy, we shall indeed be in a fearful dilemma with Kate Staunton, the widow's child. In the first place, nature had not gifted her with beauty ; and though we read of nostrums capable of transforming age into youth, and deformity into loveliness, Kate was one of the least likely persons in the world to make experiment of their powers upon herself. Thus her hair remained without a curl, a wave, or anything that could be sung about in a poem. It is true it was now kept beautifully neat, and folded partially over her cheeks and temples, with wonderful precision ; but it was of no earthly colour to which a name could possibly be given. It was neither flaxen, auburn, black, nor golden ; but rather a mixture of all tints blended into one, and that the most frequently seen and recognised under the description of brown. Her eyebrows of the same tint were clear and beautiful, giving a marked expression to her countenance in all its different changes, while her dark grey eyes looked out beneath them with a world of meaning, varying through all gradations, from the brightest joy, to the deepest earnestness of serious thought.

In person Kate was middle sized, or rather less, possessing more activity than grace, and yet not awkward. She had a firm step, and upright carriage, and all her attitudes and movements indicated the very opposite of listlessness, vacuity, or languor. She looked and acted like a person of strong purpose ; and though without the least bloom or glow upon her cheeks, it was evident that she

possessed in an unusual degree, the union of a healthy body with a vigorous mind. It may easily be supposed the young lady in question was not much addicted to hysterics, and hitherto had never fainted in her life ; but, worse than all, Kate Staunton was a slight touch selfish—not greedy, certainly ; that would have made her character a very different one from what it was. No ; she only liked herself so far as to take a general prudent care of all her own property, her time, her books, her money. These she husbanded in such a manner as to turn them to some useful purpose ; and even in giving, she was thus enabled to be more generous than young ladies generally are. It is true she was not at all in the habit of throwing all her money away at once, in a little green purse, as heroines mostly do, leaving themselves penniless until the next supply ; but by great care taking, both of clothes and other things, Kate so managed, even with her small allowance of pocket-money, as to have a little store from which she often supplied the wants of the necessitous ; and, accompanied by the kind-hearted Jenkins, Mrs. Ashley's confidential servant, went little rounds of charitable visiting, more deeply interesting to her than all the parties to which, as a member of the Ashley family, she was admitted.

The fact was, this little bit of selfishness, inherent in the character of Kate Staunton, accompanied by naturally clear judgment and quick sense, had just enabled her to acquire the habit of looking about her, so as to discover how she might turn everything that happened to some good account. As an orphan child, not very much beloved by any one, she had sorely needed this ; and finding her residence with the Ashleys in many respects but little to her taste, instead of sinking into listless murmuring and inaction—instead of weeping and repining, she had

early set about even to make the best of that ; and so with cheerful earnestness had seized a thousand golden opportunities for pleasure and improvement, which a morbidly sensitive and selfish character would have neglected or despised.

Not that Kate was otherwise than quick to feel ; she would have wanted half her womanly charm if this had been the case ; but as her character advanced towards maturity, she was so shut out from sympathy and warm affection towards herself, that she had learned to hide her feelings deep within her heart, and there to lock them in, until some fitting and appropriate time to bring them into use. Thus the same system of prudence and economy which regulated the management of her time and money, was beginning also to regulate the management of her feelings, only that sometimes a passionate indignation against fraud and double dealing got the better of her prudence, and then her naturally impetuous and strong will was exhibited in no measured form or expression.

Circumstances, however, were working great changes in the character and disposition of Kate Staunton ; and, as is frequently the case in human life, circumstances apparently least advantageous, were operating with incalculable benefit. For instance, had the widow's child in early life been placed exclusively amongst those who sympathised with, and desired to please her, she would in all probability have thrown open every feeling and every wish of her heart, looking for, and requiring, immediate attention to her demands. As it was, her feelings might as well have been distributed to the winds, as exposed to the Ashley family ; and her wishes were always more likely to be met with a sudden and peremptory check, than with even a promise of indulgence. It was perhaps



from being thus restrained, and yet determined to be contented and comfortable, that Kate Staunton had acquired the habit of making the best of circumstances. Beyond this, she had the good sense never to waste her energies in *struggling against what was inevitable*—an useful lesson both for man and woman; and the earlier learned the happier for us all.

The very fact, that Mrs. Ashley eagerly laid hold of all those opportunities of improvement provided by Mr. Staunton for his orphan charge, so as to turn them to the advantage of her own daughters, often leaving poor little Kate only second-hand music, and lessons transmitted in a very inefficient manner through a third party, had the effect of stimulating her energies, and quickening her determination not to be defeated in her favourite object, that of acquiring the greatest possible amount of learning and intellectual improvement which the nature of her circumstances permitted. Seldom, indeed, did Kate Staunton sink into despondency—seldom did she even indulge herself with a passionate flood of tears. Whenever she did this, it was alone in her little quiet chamber, where her tears were soon wiped away by her own hand, her head was soon raised, and her thoughts were soon busy again with some book, or some study, which took them entirely away from herself. The last thing in the world she would have thought of doing, was to sit down and complain that nobody loved her, and that consequently it was of no use exerting herself in any way. Perhaps the painful fact was not altogether absent from her mind—perhaps it was too painful to be dwelt upon. However that might be, no human being had ever heard her complain that she was lonely or uncared for; nor did any other belief prevail, amongst those with whom she was



associated, than that she was one of the happiest beings in the world.

Thus, then, if Kate Staunton had a shade of self-love mixed up with the varied elements of her character, it operated in a very unobtrusive and inoffensive manner, assuming most frequently an aspect of independence, and making it one of the ruling principles of her life to trouble nobody. Had tidings been brought to Kate, that the house in which she lived was on fire, she was the very person who would have been discovered afterwards to have quietly made her escape, taking, in all probability, her clothes and her most valuable property along with her; or had there been fever raging in a poor family in the neighbourhood, Kate would have devised some means of sending the sufferers relief, without going near them herself. The pity is, there are not a greater number of young ladies selfish in the same manner.

All the masters who attended the Ashley family, to give instruction in their various departments, were delighted with the aptness and proficiency of the orphan girl. With the elder young ladies, the process of education was the teacher's part entirely, the pupils being *receivers of lessons*, and nothing more. But with Kate it was widely different. Nothing which could possibly be accomplished in their absence was left undone; and her progress was consequently so rapid, that she had to be shut out from at least one lesson every week, in order that her cousins might be able to keep pace with her.

This, and a thousand other little points of pre-eminence, too trivial to specify, had the very natural effect of awakening a degree of jealousy, always accompanied with its proportion of spite, on the part of Mrs. Ashley and her daughters, who were in the habit of assigning motives

to others, of a nature very similar to those by which they were themselves actuated. Thus, in that mere thirst for knowledge, and delight in intellectual cultivation, by which Kate was influenced, they saw a selfish design to bring herself into notice, and of course to throw them into shade; and so on through every action and habit of her life. They were not openly unkind to her; they even persuaded themselves they loved her, as cousins ought to be loved; and often would have admitted her into their confidence, could she have been made useful to the furtherance of their plans. The state of feeling which existed towards her might have been best understood by listening to their talk behind her back; for there it was that she was always spoken of as being so *extremely plain*; while, to heighten and give piquancy to their observations, one sister would always persist in not seeing her so—in maintaining, that if her eyes had been blue instead of grey, her nose long instead of short, her mouth not so wide, and her complexion anything but what it was, she would really have been almost pretty. And then her dress; you would have thought, to hear them discuss that never-failing theme, that such a fright as Kate Staunton had never walked the earth; and yet her appearance was both lady-like and becoming, as much so as could possibly be expected from one whose thoughts were evidently not much occupied about such matters.

But a still more extraordinary feature of the case was exhibited on all occasions of trifling indisposition; and, happily for Kate, she knew nothing more. There seemed to be a prepossession in the minds of her aunt and cousins, that she could not by any possibility have so much as a sore throat. Her headaches they always knew the meaning of, and winked at one another; and once, when she

was confined to the house for a fortnight with a sprained ankle, they were all perfectly sure it was only stiff from want of exercise. Observations of this kind were of course only made behind her back ; and consequently the object of them remained in happy unconsciousness of what was said or thought ; while nursed and cared for by the kind-hearted Jenkins, she neither asked nor wished for more. It would have astonished her no little, could she have formed the remotest idea how they *did* talk about her—that aunt, and those five cousins, provided only, they had nothing else more interesting on the way. There was Kate's work-box always left out, and full of thread and needles, which they believed were their own ; Kate's writing-desk, the ugliest and most inconvenient thing they ever beheld, and yet how absurdly attached to it she seemed. Kate secluded in her chamber was always wondered about, as to what she could be doing ; Kate at her lessons was only trying how far she could get before them ; Kate in the house was regarded as a spy ; Kate walking out was reflected upon, as guilty of imprudence and impropriety.

And yet Kate did walk out, in spite of them all, and by herself too—out on fine summer mornings, when the dew was still upon the grass—out even beyond the limits of her uncle's grounds, tripping, with step as light as health and youth could make it, along the nearest lanes, and sometimes down to the side of the bright water, where she loved to see the gallant vessels sailing, and the fishermen busy with their nets. These, with the morning air and freshening tide, and all the busy stir of newly awakened life, gave vigour to her frame and animation to her eye. Indeed, the world to her was all amusement, interest, and instruction, view it where she would. The very milkmen,

as they passed her with their carts ; the loads of vegetables for the markets ; everything, however commonplace, had some new aspect to be viewed in, some new feature to find out ; so that an early morning walk to her was equal to a day of ordinary life, in all the thoughts it suggested, and the impressions it left upon her mind.

Lately, however, Kate had a better motive than her own amusement, or even the pursuit of health and general benefit to herself, in these early risings. She had discovered, and grieved to have discovered it so *late*, that her uncle breakfasted alone, in a very comfortless and uncared-for manner. Not that he had complained—he never did that ; but the discovery was made accidentally, by peeping into the breakfast-room one morning just after he was gone, and witnessing that wretched state of things which exists sometimes at early morning, when sleepy servants have no example in the ladies of the family, to show them how to manage better. Looking at the broken fragments of that miserable meal, Kate Staunton had stood almost aghast ; and, resolving within herself that such things should never be again, she ever afterwards came down before her uncle, with her own hands arranged the breakfast things, and then presided at the table, in her cheerful chatty way, making it seem to him the pleasantest thing in the whole world to do so.

At first Mr. Ashley had remonstrated. Knowing the difficulty which some ladies would have found in performing such early duties, he believed that none could really like the task, and had a thousand scruples about inflicting such a tax on any one. But Kate was quite equal to combating arguments of this kind in the most effectual manner. Very foreign to her habits were those extravagant expressions of affection which sound like mockery from one,



when others are so silent, or worse than silent, on that point. No ; Kate knew better. She had a way of her own of managing these niceties ; and being reputed in the Ashley family a selfish character, she made the most of this unlovely attribute, and told her uncle how she always walked before breakfast herself, and how delighted she should be to join him at his tea, for really she grew quite faint, she said, sometimes before the family were ready. We trust it was not very far from the strict truth that Kate departed ; but certainly her cheerful hearty countenance belied her, when she talked of faintness. Well, she had yet her walk to take—a brisk walk of an hour long, and that was something. No doubt she would perform it much more comfortably for having shared her uncle's early breakfast.

Some young ladies would have thought it selfish in Kate Staunton to think about her health ; but she knew better than any one could tell her the value of these cheerful early walks, and how they kept away dull headaches and low spirits, and gave her strength and energy to get through the little trials of each day. She knew too, how sad a thing it would be, as she was circumstanced, to lose that buoyant health of mind as well as body which supported her ; she knew how little in her orphan lot there was to render illness, or even delicacy of constitution, interesting ; and thus acting upon the grand principle of taking care of herself, Kate was really more efficient as a prop, and more at liberty to take care of others.

It seemed as if many circumstances were conspiring to render the early morning walks of Kate Staunton the most eventful, as well as the happiest, portion of her life. Those delicate attentions to her uncle's comfort, which did so much to cheer his desolate heart, had given them the cha-

racter of a duty ; the fresh morning air and the lively exercise were themselves sufficient to send her home a happier being than she went out ; but now there were occasional meetings with a friend, with one who was wholly unaccustomed to be met with at that strange hour, which often sent the happy Kate home to her second breakfast with the family, in a very absent state of mind, and for the first time in her life with a slight flush upon her cheek.

On these occasions the Misses Ashley wondered, as well they might, what had come over their young cousin. It is true she had her Italian grammar in her hand, and was preparing like themselves for morning lessons ; but all the while that she mistook the qualities of cream and sugar, she looked so conscious of some secret source of happiness, something that made her more indifferent than ever about what was transpiring around her, that the half asleep young ladies were quite indignant against one who seemed to have some secret fount of happiness, at which she drank unknown to them. It is probable they would have been a great deal more indignant had they known what was the real nature of this sweet draught, and by whom it was administered.

Poor Kate had lived so long, and yet so pleasantly upon a merely negative kind of satisfaction, that one pure drop of real positive happiness went much farther with her than it would have done with most young ladies. But we will tell her secret for her ; for though she chose from prudential motives not to tell it herself, she was very far from being ashamed of it.

We have said already, that Arthur Hamilton was often of the parties joined in by the Ashley family—often, too, a visitor at their house, where he was much admired and talked about. Instead, however, of directing his attentions

to the highly educated, and so far as they could be without any effort of their own, the learned and accomplished daughters of the house, this young gentleman, with a strange perversity of taste, had seldom much regard to bestow upon any one but the poor cousin. It was all her own doing, the Misses Ashley protested; they never saw anything so pointed as her manner; indeed, they and their mother were quite ashamed of it, and often told her, in plain terms, how disgusted they knew Mr. Hamilton was; to which Kate was accustomed to reply, with a hearty laugh, that she was very sorry for him. But the unpardonable offence, whoever might be the guilty party, was still persisted in, and even grew to such a height, that Mr. Hamilton ceased to be an invited guest to the Ashley parties; and this privation was probably the reason why he first bethought himself of some other means of continuing his enjoyment of an intercourse which had become already too agreeable to be willingly resigned. It is true it seemed a heavy tax to pay for pleasure, to rise early to obtain it; but having once or twice done this, the difficulty wore away, while the repayment seemed ever more and more enhanced in value.

Nor was Kate Staunton insensible to the sacrifice which her young friend was making. Poor, and sometimes slighted as she was, she had often been deeply grateful for his attentions when he singled her out from a brilliant and attractive circle; and convinced her, without one flattering expression, that to him, at least, she had charms beyond those of wealth or beauty. A plain woman is always most susceptible on this point; and if a man would be loved with gratitude as well as admiration, let him look away from the beauty whose ear has been accustomed to those tones of adulation, which, though they soon pall upon the



senses, create but too certainly a feeling that they can at all times be demanded as a right. Although Kate was far from being plain enough to be spoken of as such, except by her cousins, she was equally far from being what is called a gentleman's beauty. Hence, she was the better prepared to appreciate, according to its true value, the interest which was rapidly growing in the heart of Arthur Hamilton towards her. It is not pretended that she was without her share of womanly vanity; and this, assisted by her naturally quick perceptions, convinced her that while flattery and kind attentions, or even costly and precious gifts, might require but little self-denial on the part of the giver, to rise earlier by two hours in the morning, in order to share her company in a quiet walk, was indeed a strong evidence that she was not an object of indifference.

And thus the early walks and the growing intimacy went on. At first the conversation of the two friends was little more than social chat, with a good deal of badinage, and talk about themselves and each other. Sometimes there was a slight affront to be made up, and then the next meeting was looked forward to with tenfold interest. Sometimes, too, they both grew serious—strong proof that something else was growing—and talked about their uncongenial lives, and how they were uncared for, both protesting that they did not care; until, by degrees, a very probable conclusion dawned upon them—that they might as well begin to care about each other. Why should they not? Each held a lonely, isolated place in the creation, and was, to a certain extent, amenable to nobody; and whatever they possessed by nature of warm, affectionate, and social feeling, had been hitherto, in great measure, thrown away, for want of some object upon which it might be expended without waste. Both had been sensible of the



want, though each had felt it in a very different manner from the other. With Arthur Hamilton, it had produced the effect of making him reckless, extravagant, and always bent upon the enjoyment of the moment; for what, he often asked, had he to render him otherwise? With Kate, as we have seen, it produced the happier consequence of inducing a concentration of thought, and a prudent care-taking of herself, which appeared to those who knew her to have grown entirely out of her situation in the Ashley family.

It was not very difficult for two young persons thus situated to persuade themselves that life would be altogether much happier if they each lived for the other; and no sooner had that idea taken possession of their minds, than the one thing which life had hitherto wanted appeared to be supplied. As a lover, Arthur Hamilton was by far the most ardent, and at the same time the most requiring; but as one whose heart is truly and entirely given, and whose whole world of hopes and wishes, and depth of buried love, and height of noble aspirations, are given with it, he found in the companion of his happy hours a friend who, while she chatted in her playful manner by his side, would have walked with him as willingly through shame and sorrow; nay, had there been need for it, would have gone before him to the fiery stake, and raised his fainting spirit there with her dying hymn of triumph.

It was no part of the character of Kate Staunton to trifle about anything serious, and to her it *was* serious to love. If there was one feature of that character more strongly marked than all others, it was her earnestness. When, therefore, she stood with her hand clasped eagerly in that of Arthur Hamilton, and, looking with her clear speaking eyes into his face, plighted her maiden vow to be the sharer

of his future lot, whatever it might be, a solemn awe came over her, as if she had signed a holy covenant which could not be maintained without a blessing from above.

Alas! poor girl, she had no mother's bosom on which to weep that night, and tell her tale of hope and joy; for happiness has tears as well as grief. All that she could do was to seek her solitary chamber at an early hour, there to hold communion with her heart, and to ask the Father of the fatherless to hear her prayers.

## CHAPTER XIV.



THE affection which had taken possession of the heart of Lucy Lee was as unlike that of her cousin Kate, as their two characters were different from each other. To the one it was her whole life; to the other it was her object in living. Wholly absorbed by this one feeling, Lucy ceased almost to occupy herself, even as she had done before; while Kate grew every day more busy, and more intent upon making herself worthy of being beloved and valued. Wandering about the picturesque grounds and garden of Hatherstone, Lucy lived always in a dream. Intent upon her books, her lessons, and the husbanding of her many resources, the existence of Kate Staunton became a thousand-fold more real than it had ever been before. Perhaps she wanted sentiment; for amongst all the loose papers which lay upon her table, there never could have been found a single line of poetry addressed to Arthur Hamilton, nor even to the moon. We are not prepared to say there never was a glove of his, well mended, in her work-box; but of poetic rhapsody, we have every reason to believe that Kate was guiltless.

But it is high time to turn our attention once more to

the old Hall of Hatherstone. Is it the brooding wing of some dark angel that makes the woods so dull and sombre? Most certainly there are evenings in the height of summer that far outdo the depth of winter for their gloom and sadness; and Lucy takes her accustomed walk on one of these, for ever at the close of day she visits that secluded spot, so loved now, where once she knelt upon the grass, and poured her soul out in those burning words, no one of which she since has wished recalled. It is an evening which makes the timid wanderer start, clouded and gusty, with strange rushings in the breeze, as if the woods were peopled by unquiet spirits—not of earth, nor yet of heaven. The long grass, and the scarcely bearded corn, sway mournfully, like restless billows; and deep sounds—half sigh, half murmur—wake fitfully upon the ear, making the listener look around. How dark, on such an evening, looks the laurel walk, too dark, almost, to venture through—how deep the shadow of the thick beech wood—how solemn in their stateliness the tall smooth stems! It is not twilight, and yet some universal darkness, like a great eclipse, spreads over earth and sky. The winter has no scene like this, for the bare trees gather no gloom beneath them. The sharp storm has life, and power, and freshness in it; and the black night comes on with a reality that sends us shivering to our fires. But this is a visible darkness—daylight without the sun—in which the very flowers appear to live and grow without their bloom.

Such weather had prevailed all day, and when the evening came, a cheerful fire was lighted in the old oak parlour at the Hall, and Michael Staunton drew his chair beside it, rubbing his hands, and talking of the cold. Margaret thought he often had been cold of late, and with an anxious watchful eye she sometimes looked at him, wonder-



ing if age was creeping on more rapidly ; and yet believing, that if things went well, and he could be kept unruffled by any shock or contradiction, many peaceful years might yet pass over him, before he assumed the character of a really old man. It was very natural that Margaret should see him thus, for she had known so much of the vigour of his earlier days, and the energy of his strong will and purpose, that the same tones of his voice, and the same quick flashing eye, produced the same impression still upon her mind ; and watchful as she was of every symptom of pain or weakness, a stranger would perhaps have better understood the actual place which Michael Staunton held, in his slow progress towards the termination of his healthy and vigorous life.

The evening already described offered but little temptation for a solitary walk, and yet the gentle Lucy found it impossible to remain seated by the fire, attractive as it looked, beside her grandfather and his quiet wife. Her thoughts were elsewhere—her heart was not with them : and though she had no expectation of beholding again for some time that beautiful vision which had so often dawned upon her, like the deity of classic story to some wandering wood-nymph, yet the very spot where they had met was so sacred, so full of interest profound, that almost with the step of one who goes to worship at some holy shrine, she went at evening hour to tread that grassy plot ; or, seated on that rustic seat, to lose herself in happy dreams, which yet had nothing to disturb them. No matter then to Lucy how the garden looked, what winds were rushing, or what shadows fell ; no matter what was stirring in the world without—misfortune, or calamity ; she heard of them like things which had no power to come to her. She had planted, as she thought, her tender foot upon a rock,

and with that hold, no matter how the billows rolled, or tempests howled around her.

Gentle and timid as her disposition naturally was, Lucy seemed now insensible to apprehension ; and though she sometimes started as the ruffled boughs sprung back against her dress, it was not that she feared to wander through those shady walks alone—still less to sit alone beneath that spreading tree, which stretched its kind protecting arms around her, and which she grew to love as if it actually bent over her with parental tenderness and care.

Some hearts more calculating, and more experienced than Lucy's, would have wondered why the beautiful vision did not more speedily appear again ; but to Lucy all was right which he could say or do ; and kind and frequent letters told of urgent claims, and how impossible it was, consistently with duty, to make them yield to pleasure. So she sat down contented, thinking only what an admirable character his must be, with whom the question of duty was the first consideration.

Lost in these pleasant dreams, Lucy had sat some time, when either the wind rose higher, or—delightful thought !—his step was actually near ; and, wholly absorbed in this sudden, but ever welcome anticipation, she held her breath to listen, carefully refraining from any sound or sign that might betray the precious secret of her bosom. So strong indeed was her conviction, so entire her confidence, and so powerful the preoccupation of her mind with this one idea, that she even withheld all exclamation of alarm, when the figure of a strange man emerged from the shrubbery, and stood before her. Even then she thought it was her lover in disguise ; and while she gazed and listened in astonished attitude, a smile of blissful recognition played upon her lips. Soon, however, this happy smile was gone, and but

that every power seemed paralysed with sudden horror, the woods had echoed with her wild and terrified shriek. Worse than all, the stranger grasped her arm with his strong hand, and at the same instant, tearing away a coarse disguise which had concealed his features, she saw it was her father ! Even then, under the strong revulsion caused by this discovery, Lucy would have fainted on the ground, but that he clasped her in his arms, and spoke to her with kindness and assurance—spoke even jestingly, and bade her listen to his story. It was a trick of his, he said—a harmless trick, not meant to startle her, but to serve a more important purpose.

By degrees the terrified girl grew more composed, and as she leaned her head upon her father's shoulder, the very tones of his so well remembered voice conveyed a sense of safety, as in the trusting days of infancy, when she was used to lay her golden locks upon his bosom, and sing herself to sleep. And was she not an infant still ?—the veriest child that ever trusted, and was satisfied—less in the truth of any words she heard, than in the voice beloved, by which such words were spoken.

“ Lucy, dear Lucy,” said her father ; “ am I not welcome to you ? ”

A silent embrace, a pressure of her cheek to his, was all the answer Lucy made.

“ I am going on a journey, Lucy,” he continued ; and by the faltering tones of his voice, it seemed almost as if his heart was melting. The fact was, that in that soft embrace, he had forgot his own nature for a moment, and gone back to long passed times, when childhood's fond caresses had a kind of soothing in them, even for him. There are some persons more affected by a touch, or tone—a something which appeals to the outward sense, than by the keenest

feeling, if expressed through channels less immediate. Mr. Lee was one of these. He could have listened to the tidings of his daughter's death; but thus to feel her loving arms once more twined round him—to have the silken tresses of her golden hair so wrapped about his eyes and forehead, as to shut the world out for a moment,—it had well nigh mastered him. But time was precious; and he started to his feet, and seized his watch, as if with greedy eye devouring the fast-flying minutes.

"Lucy," he said, "I cannot stay;" and now his voice was altered, and his manner seemed so wild and strange, that Lucy once more shrunk affrighted from his side.

"I have an object to accomplish," he went on to say, "and every instant warns me to be gone."

"What is it, father?" Lucy ventured to inquire.

"No matter, child, to you," he answered. "It would not interest you, and you could not understand it; a money matter only."

"Has any one been robbing you?"

"Yes, robbing me indeed! A villain has gone off with thousands, and I am in pursuit of him."

"Ah! now I understand. That horrible disguise, which frightened me so at first ——"

"Yes, everything depends upon my reaching him without his knowledge."

"Has he gone far?"

"I fear he has; and that it may be many days—nay, weeks—before you hear of me again; and therefore it was that I came out this way, to see you once again, dear Lucy."

"Oh! father, you are going upon some dangerous journey—I know you are; and we shall never meet again!"

"Perhaps I am, Lucy; but what of that? I must not



let the man escape without an effort. It is a strange thing, Lucy—very strange,”—and Mr. Lee was very busy feeling for his pocket-book,—“but, in my haste, I do believe I have come without sufficient money to take me even to Dover;” and he laughed a strange forced laugh, which Lucy might have noticed, but for the sudden interest she took in this her father’s new dilemma.

“How strange!” he still went on to say, and still kept fumbling with a nearly empty purse. “It is this vile great coat,” he said, “which has bewildered me. I know I had my pocket-book only a moment before I put it on. What in the world am I to do? A sovereign—two sovereigns—would get me to Dover, and there I have a friend.”

“Alas!” said Lucy, “how unfortunate I am;” for she too held an empty purse within her quivering fingers. “To-morrow is the day for giving me my pocket-money. If I could only run into the house, and ask for it——”

But this suggestion was stopped by the grasp of her father’s hand upon her arm; and he seized her so forcibly, that the pressure remained long afterwards, in dark bruises, on that snowy skin. “By no means,” he exclaimed; “say not one word, nor ever let the fact transpire, that you have seen me here. Yet, if you could by stealth obtain me anything—even a sovereign—half a sovereign ——”

“Ah! now I recollect,” said Lucy, “I have a sovereign of my own. I can run in as quick as lightning;” and, saying this, she vanished like a spirit, gliding through the dark shrubby walk, so light and rapid was her tread; and while her white dress floated in the distance, the speed at which she flew kept out all question or reflection from her mind; but on, and on, she went—in at a private

door of the old hall, and up a winding stair which led into the chamber where she slept, and where her little hoard of treasures was deposited in a curious cabinet, embellished by her own skilful hand.

Rapid as were the movements with which Lucy prosecuted her purpose, she could not help perceiving, as she passed, that the oak parlour was vacated; and hearing some voices on the stairs, she listened for a moment, and discovered that her grandfather, under the careful nursing of Margaret, was being disposed of in his own room, at an unusually early hour, in consequence of symptoms of an approaching cold having been discovered. Thus, all was bustle in that part of the mansion; and whatever might be Lucy's agitated appearance, it was little likely, at such a time, to attract the attention of the servants; for even the slightest indisposition in the master of the house, or any departure from his accustomed habits, was treated as an event of all-absorbing interest.

Thus, then, it was an easy matter, under such circumstances, for Lucy to reach her chamber, open her private drawer, and escape out of the house again, without exciting any particular attention. The pity was, that she had but one sovereign. How she did grieve, and fret herself, to think it was so little—and the very next morning five would be her portion; already were they not her own?—already *due*, if not possessed? Oh that she might have trusted Margaret!—have asked her only for that portion, on promise to explain some other day the reason why she had needed it. Yet, how explain? Her father's charge was so imperative—his very grasp seemed yet upon her arm.

These thoughts came flashing through her mind swifter than words could utter them; and time was pressing—

what could she do? Alas! she must go back with that poor piece of gold. Her own father, too; how sad, that she could serve him in this strait no better.

Anxious to avoid the many busy steps now passing to and fro in one department of the household, Lucy turned into a different suite of rooms, in order to retrace her steps into the garden; and, as she passed along, she had to go through a small chamber appropriated to Margaret's domestic purposes: Here Lucy always had received her quarter's payment; here all affairs of importance connected with the government of Margaret's household were transacted; here the parting servant was dismissed, and never went without some farewell token of respect and kindness, if deserved,—some friendly christian counsel for her future guidance. Here, in a curiously carved oaken casket, was deposited the housekeeper's whole store of wealth for present purposes; and now, as Lucy passed, she saw the casket open—strange instance of forgetfulness on Margaret's part, and only to be accounted for by sudden anxiety on her husband's behalf.

Strange instance of forgetfulness, and yet "how opportune!" thought Lucy, as she looked with stealthy gaze into the casket. At that moment a gleam of parting sunshine glanced into the little chamber. Lucy felt it like encouragement, and told her conscience there could be no wrong in taking then what would be her's to-morrow—time so pressing, too, and opportunity so favourable. Once she looked around her—once she listened—all was still. Another moment and the prize was her's, and she was gone more swiftly than she came—gone through the shadowy walks, nor stopped to think, until she almost reached the rustic seat, all breathless, with her hair dishevelled, and floating back upon the wind.





*Another moment and the page was lost*





Sensible as Lucy was of the disguise her father had assumed, and how completely it had transformed his whole appearance, a sudden terror came upon her again, as she beheld him crouching like a murderer amongst those overhanging trees ; while, as she neared the spot, his step grew quicker, and his eyes looked peering, wild, and tiger-like, amongst the boughs. Once her faith failed her that it really was her father, and strange thoughts arose of some dark plot against her life ; but, eager for the promised aid, he now came forward, and, with lips of ashy whiteness, demanded why she had been so long, and what she had brought ?

“ Look here,” said Lucy, holding out the money. In an instant it was clenched, and buried in his bosom. Not a word of kindness now was spoken, not a faint adieu was breathed. Bad thoughts, like demons, had been busy with him in that transient absence of his child, until the solitude became intolerable ; and ever as he trod the ground impatient, and with rapid step, his feet seemed pressing on hot iron, until he almost leaped with agony, and burned to be away.

What should he wait for ? Like a bird of evil omen, having gorged its prey, his dark and frightful figure disappeared. A rush was heard amongst the laurel boughs—a crackling of the fence—a leap—a tread—and he was gone, and Lucy stood alone.

Ah, how the aspect of the world is changed sometimes in one short moment ! For the first time in her life, a sense of guilt fell on the soul of that poor girl. What she had done herself was but a part of that foul stain, so hideous on a parent’s brow. Not that she altogether doubted yet the story he had told her. To her mind the tale seemed plausible enough ; but, like her father, she was the crea-

ture of impressions ; and, in the fiery appetite with which he grasped that gold, the harsh and rattling tones of his thick voice, the glare of his red eyes, the chattering of his clenched teeth, and the tremulous quivering of his pale blue lips ; above all, in the tiger-bound with which he left her there, poor Lucy read a page of guilty horrors, so terrible, that scarcely could a thunder peal have rolled above her head with more tremendous force.

Stunned by the shock, and almost blinded by her strong emotions, there she stood without a tear. It was a moment of agony too keen for tears : too much of terror and repulsion mingled with her anguish. And was *that* her father whom she had so loved ? Surely the whole must be a frightful dream—a spectral visitation, such as are said to come before the hour of death ; and then came terror indescribable, and wondering thoughts of news from home, with dismal tidings of her father having died just at that frightful moment.

Whether Lucy swooned upon the ground, or what became of her, she never knew, until, awaking in her own chamber, she beheld the form of Margaret bending over her, and kind attendants by her pillow threw an air of safety and security around her. By degrees a sense of something dreadful dawned upon her, and then a thrill of horror came, with shiverings like the beginning of a fever ; but then again she thought it must be all a dream, and then she tried to rise, and shake it from her, and forget it in her wonted occupations. By degrees, however, one dark passage of this horrible dream grew real. Some theme of deep importance seemed to occupy all who came around her. Chiefly Margaret went in and out with troubled countenance, marked, however, more with indignation than distress ; and there as she lay with closed eyes on her

pillow, seeking the sleep she could not find, her ear was startled by loud whisperings, which excited even her languid curiosity to discover what could be the purport of such earnest conversation.

At last the whole secret flashed upon her mind only too clearly. A theft had been committed on the previous evening, and in a household where strict integrity was the ruling principle—where to be above suspicion was the general aim; an act of gross and daring dishonesty produced, throughout the whole establishment, sensations of no common description.

Poor Lucy, weak and half bewildered, what was she to do? The natural impulse of her heart was to call the kind and watchful Margaret to her, and to tell her all. But Margaret, with all her gentleness, had no mercy on dishonesty. A sort of constitutional hatred of all falsehood and deception had been her greatest recommendation in the opinion of Michael Staunton, even from her youth; and she had seen and experienced nothing since that time calculated to make her more tolerant on the subject of theft. A thief was nothing but a thief to Margaret, let him be a prince or a beggar; and she thought no better of a lady who could steal a diamond from a casket, than of a gipsy who could rob a hen-roost, or break into a barn. It was not, therefore, on all subjects that Margaret was a person to be easily conciliated. No; her character had its strong points, as well as its tender ones, or she would have been a much less admirable person than she was.

Still, what could Lucy do? It was evident the case was growing worse and worse. The dreadful and abhorrent fact had reached the ear of Michael Staunton; and, forgetting all his indisposition of the previous evening, he had risen at early dawn, and, with his confidential servant



Thomas, had entered methodically upon the business of investigation. Even now this process of examination was going on in the oak parlour; and Lucy, as she lay with her eyes closed, could hear the name of one servant after another called loudly from the bottom of the stairs, each one to take her turn, like a prisoner at the bar, with the keen eyes of her old master fixed searchingly upon her face. All, however, went fearlessly, and were even glad when, honourably released, they came again to tell in triumph how clearly they had come off. Only on one occasion Lucy could discover symptoms of unwillingness to go, and whisperings of great length and earnestness, when one particular housemaid was called down.

"What will you do?" she heard her companion say to her.

"Tell the whole truth," replied the girl.

"But are you sure?" asked the first speaker.

"As sure as I am of my own life," replied the housemaid. "I was standing just against the door of the blue chamber, and I saw her come out of the very room herself—her hair all wild-like, as if she had been running in the wind, and such a frightened look about her. Nobody shall convince me but there's been something wrong, and I'll tell all, if my name's Martha."

So saying the girl flew down stairs, and in the meantime Lucy's cheek grew hot and red, and then all deathly pale, while drops of perspiration gathered on her brow. Oh, what a world of suffering is spared by making honest principle and open truth the rule of life! Perhaps, of all the agonies to which this mortal state is subject, none could be more intense than Lucy felt at that decisive moment—fearing to do the thing she ought, yet fearing more to leave it undone.

At last she opened her soft eyes, and looked around her. Margaret alone was in the room, sitting in thoughtful attitude, and wholly lost in wondering calculations about the incomprehensible affair which occupied every member of the family, almost to the exclusion of all other subjects.

Seeing a movement in the bed, Margaret looked up, and Lucy beckoned with her white hand for her to come nearer. On approaching the pale trembling girl, whose arms were stretched out to clasp her neck, Margaret bent down as if to listen, for she saw the blue lips quivering, and a slight movement like convulsion passed over her face, indicating some painful feeling, or some deep purpose, and Margaret knew too well what had been said about the appearance of Lucy on the previous evening, not to desire above all things to hear her own account of what had happened.

"What is it, dear?" said Margaret, in her kindest tone.

"I took the money," whispered the now weeping girl; and tears, most happily for her, came plentifully to her relief.

"How? why?" said Margaret, for she felt the necessity of knowing all. "What could induce you to take money, without asking me."

"You were engaged," said Lucy, "and I had not a moment to consider—not a moment."

"Do tell me all," said Margaret. "I cannot understand you."

"I dare not," whispered Lucy. "It is not my secret, but another person's."

"Every word you utter," replied Margaret, "makes the case more mysterious. I am afraid you have been

very guilty, child. Do tell me all, that I may do you justice."

"I cannot, and you must not press me," replied Lucy. "And yet you would not think of me so hardly, if you knew all."

"Then tell me, dearest; do tell me," reiterated Margaret. "It is your grandfather that must be satisfied. He *will* know all—he ought to know it—and I would not, if I could, keep anything from him."

Lucy turned her face upon her pillow, and sobbed heavily.

"Some time," she said, at last, "I will tell you all. I cannot, dare not now. It would so vex my grandfather. He never liked my father, and I dare not name him in his presence."

"It was your father, then?" asked Margaret, and she too grew pale and trembled.

All the answer Lucy gave, was a strong pressure of the hand she had been holding, and then she fell into deep silence.

"Send me away," said Lucy, rousing herself at last. "Send me away to my mother. It is not fit that I should remain here." And springing up with sudden energy, she began to prepare herself for the only alternative which, under present circumstances, seemed to offer any hope of satisfaction to her harassed mind.

"I think you are right," said Margaret, after weighing the subject for a few moments in her usual thoughtful way. "I think, if I may venture to take this upon myself, it will be best for you to go immediately. I will consult with Thomas." And saying this, she hastened out of the room, leaving Lucy much happier now that she had really something to bestir herself about, some object

to look forward to ; and above all happier in the prospect of pouring out her griefs and her perplexities into her mother's ear, and communicating to the only being who could properly be made acquainted with them, the fears which had been awakened by the strange conduct and appearance of her father on the previous evening.

Indefinitely as this vision had dawned upon her awakening recollection, it was still fraught with horrors unspeakable ; and little as she knew respecting the money transactions of her father, who had always kept them a profound mystery in his family, it was impossible to withstand the strong impression that something must be so far wrong, as to make it absolutely necessary that her mother should be made acquainted with the facts so fearfully brought under her own notice.

As this conviction grew rapidly more powerful in her mind, Lucy became increasingly impatient to be gone ; and after various consultations with Margaret, who, as well as the man Thomas, deemed it safest, under present circumstances, for her not to be confronted with her grandfather, a plan was formed for having her conveyed under safe escort to the town of M ——, Margaret promising to undertake her cause when she was gone, with what ability she might.

Altogether it was a sad departure, that of poor Lucy from the old Hall, where she had spent so many happy days and months. Upon those venerable walls, and ancient yew-trees, and green walks, she tried to look for the last time ; but scalding tears were in her eyes, as the carriage which conveyed her rolled rapidly away. Even that chosen spot—that temple of her worship—the rustic seat, beneath the old tree, was left behind. Would she ever revisit that secluded spot with step as light as that of the




young fawn, or be again the happy, innocent, and buoyant girl she had been there ?

One thought, and one alone, remained the same with Lucy as she passed away from these familiar scenes. It was her love—the rock on which she stood unshaken. Storms might come, and billows rage—perhaps they had come, and were raging, loudly and fearfully ; but to that rock she clung, and looked defiance to the furious elements. Nothing she thought could overwhelm her there ; and as the frightened child believes not in the monster which it cannot see, while buried in its mother's bosom, so she lost all sense of the reality of grief and danger while that rock remained whereon to hang, and rest, and shut out from her sight alike all pain and peril.

The woman who loves thus blindly often seems to bear a charmed life. She cares for no calamity but what assails her from one quarter. Poverty has to her no terrors, because she has her own hidden wealth, of which nothing can deprive her. Sickness only makes it sweeter to be soothed and visited by one who brings a never-failing balm. The loss of friends is scarcely felt, because she has still one left, in whom are centred all her sympathies and hopes. The loss of rank or fortune brings no shame, because she has one wreath of glory ever round her brow. Alas ! was such a soul-absorbing passion ever meant for earth ?

## CHAPTER XV.



y the time that Lucy Lee had reached the outskirts of the populous town in which her parents resided, the familiar aspect of well known places, and all the stir and rush of busy life, the handsome equipages rolling to and fro, the villas with their gates and pleasure grounds—all welcome sights, inspiring, as they do, a secret sense of confidence in the prosperity and wealth by which they are supported, seemed to drive away from the mind of the sad traveller those fearful misgivings with which she had set out. There was, in fact, an agreeable reality in all these objects which put to flight her vague suspicions; and chiefly as she neared the place where Frederick Ashley carried on his prosperous undertakings, she persuaded herself that, come what might to her family, she had a friend in him who never would allow them to fall into absolute distress. So firm, so broad was the rock upon which she stood herself, that her imagination easily found room for her father, mother, brother, all whom she loved to stand beside her.

On reaching the door of her father's house, Lucy knocked a long time before it was opened; at last she was

admitted by a servant, unaccustomed to that duty, and on asking for her mother, was told she had gone out early, the servant believed to the office—for her brother, then?—he was off into the country—had not been home all night—for Betsy?—she was gone with her mistress.

Lucy went into the dining room—the fire had gone out—a candle burnt into the socket stood upon the table, a chair lay on the floor overturned, and letters and loose papers were strewn about the room. As Lucy stood there, a loud knock was heard at the door. She hastened upstairs, and in the drawing room the curtains had never been undrawn. In the bed rooms, there was the same appearance of neglect and disorder; and as she roamed from one chamber to another the loud knocking still continued.

Wholly unable to conjecture what could be the meaning of such unusual sights and sounds, Lucy ventured to look out of the window. Several men were there,—as she thought, angry looking and impatient men, and she wondered why the servants did not let them in.

Where can they be?" said Lucy; and ringing the bell in her mother's dressing-room, she only added to the confusion, without obtaining any farther intelligence. "If I could but find my mother," she exclaimed; and hurrying down stairs into the lowest department of the almost deserted mansion, demanded of a frightened looking woman there, if anything had occurred in the house to make it look so strange.

"Not in the house, that I know of," said the woman.

"Where then?" asked Lucy.

"It's at the office, and the works, where the great stir is, as they tell me," said the woman.

"What stir?" asked Lucy, beginning to be vio-

lently agitated. "Has anything happened to my father?"

"Why, as to that," said the woman, "he knows best himself. I don't hear as he's been seen since this time yesterday."

"I can explain that," replied Lucy, "myself. He had to go off in great haste on some business of importance."

"Business of importance!" said the woman with a sneer, and a slight shrug of the shoulders. "It's a pity but he'd made it more a business of importance to pay people their wages."

"Do you think I should be likely to find my mother at the office," asked Lucy, "if I were to go there?"

"Bless your heart and life," exclaimed the woman, "you must not go there. I don't know but they would tear you to pieces."

"Then what am I to do?" sighed Lucy, in utter despondency.

"I should say go to your friends," replied the woman.

"I have but one friend to whom I could go," said Lucy, and a faint blush stole over her face. "Do you think you could obtain a carriage for me? I don't feel as if I could walk."

"I'll try," said the woman, wiping her hands upon her apron; and as she went out at the back door, Lucy saw that there also men, and women too, were gathering as if she had been a spectacle to be shewn, and her father's house a place of public exhibition.

No sooner was the door opened, than two or three of these idlers edged themselves in. One woman with a baby in her arms made good her footing in the middle of



the kitchen ; a great girl stared Lucy in the face as if she had been a monster ; and further liberties would no doubt soon have been taken with the larder and store room, but that a man "dressed in a little brief authority," marched stoutly in, and commanding every intruder to leave the premises on the instant, took some by the shoulder, and sent them in no very ceremonious manner to find their way up the area steps.

But for the sound of approaching wheels, Lucy would have escaped from witnessing these strange proceedings ; but her faithful messenger returned without delay, and the carriage was already waiting to convey her—where ? Where she *ought* to go, she never asked herself ; but her heart, like that of the sorrowing Thekla told her, "there was but one place in the world," and thither she directed the driver of the carriage to take her.

Frederick Ashley had long since ceased to be domiciled with his own family. There were certain inconveniencies connected even with the slightest intercourse with them, in consequence of which he would not have been very sorry had an open rupture separated them still more widely. But there are cases in which people cannot be affronted, and this was one ; for distant as was the part of the town in which the son and brother had taken up their abode, scarcely a week passed over, without a lengthy call from some female member of the family ; and it was astonishing how often on these occasions they were in immediate want of change. Luncheon was also a thing in great requisition at such times ; and what with parcels directed to be left and paid for at his office, and innumerable other plans of accommodation which were perpetually suggesting themselves to the mind of Mrs. Ashley, the young gentleman had altogether more than

his match, in a small way, with his mother and five sisters.

Whether it was from such associations Frederick Ashley had learned to put himself on the defensive whenever a female visitor was announced, or whether he was that day particularly engaged, the fact is certain, that the well known name of Miss Lee was conveyed into his sitting room without producing any immediate effect in bringing him down stairs to welcome his unexpected guest. Perhaps Lucy thought nothing of this—perhaps her mind was too full of other and weightier considerations to allow her even to dream that her lover kept his seat until she had fairly entered the room. Then, indeed, he did rise and extend his hand to her, as he would have done to any other visitor on business, not neglecting to ask, in tones by no means the most encouraging, what in the world could have brought her there?

It was not to be wondered at that Lucy, altogether overcome by a thousand new and contending emotions, should rush towards him with the simplicity of a child, and burying her face on his shoulder, should burst into an agony of tears—tears how natural, and how salutary to a troubled soul like hers. The last thing she would have thought of at that moment was a symptom of repulsion. She felt it not, for she had no capacity to understand it; and when her cousin, supporting her in his arms, simply because he could not allow her to sink upon the ground, conducted her to a couch, and there leaving her, placed himself upon a seat at a considerable distance, she only struggled to recover herself so far as to tell him the whole of her sad story, which she began with the utmost confidence that it would bring him to her side, perhaps never to be separated again.

At first, however, Lucy had to ask questions; for the absence of her mother, and the state in which she had found her home, were still to be accounted for; and no sooner had she touched on this subject, than her cousin exclaimed again, with some impatience—"What on earth could have brought you from Hatherstone at such a crisis?"

Alas! there was a dark history in the background—everything, indeed, was dark; but still Lucy stood upon her rock, and she went on, faithfully detailing all that had transpired in connection with her sudden escape from her grandfather's displeasure. Yes, she told all—the interview with her father; for was not Frederick Ashley her second self, from whom she ought not, even if she had the power, to conceal a single thought or fact—was it not, too, as important to him as to herself, to know all things connected with her family affairs?—were not their lives bound up together, and was not her sorrow his sorrow, and her degradation his shame? Thus, then, she made it a point of conscience to tell him all, until she came to the taking of the money, and the discovery of the fact, when she was startled by a sudden stroke of his clenched hand upon the table, and a loud and angry exclamation—"Michael Staunton never will forgive that! You are a beggar now, if ever there was one; and you have sealed your own doom!"

"I believe I am," said Lucy, very faintly; "but you know, dear Frederick, I never cared for money."

"Pshaw—twaddle!" was the amiable response.

"I care only for my mother," she continued, with the same feeble, yet earnest voice; "but you will be a son to her, will you not, Frederick?—and if any great misfortune has happened, you will make everything right? I seem to care for nothing now that I have come to you."



Frederick Ashley rose from his seat, walked to the window, and bit his lip. Reseating himself, he began to speak in an altered manner, and without once directing his eyes to the fair figure that still reclined upon the couch, so helpless in herself, and yet so hoping, so trusting, so believing, in him.

It was, indeed, a picture upon which few men so circumstanced could have looked without emotion; and the expression—"Poor foolish child!" did almost tremble on his lips. A child indeed she was, for the world had thus far passed before her with its bright side only visible, its surface only seen; and as little did she yet know of what was hid beneath, as if the sunshine, and the flowers, and the pastime of childhood had formed the whole sum of her life and her experience. It was not merely her beauty which rendered the picture so touching, though that, in the attitude she had unconsciously assumed, was such as an artist might have traversed distant lands in search of. Her form, of the most perfect symmetry, had fallen just as nature dictated to one so wearied first, and now so much at rest. One beautiful hand supported her head, with the elbow resting on the couch, while the other lay listlessly beside her, for she seemed to have no longer need for effort; and while she gazed with her soft blue eyes intently upon the countenance of her companion, as if reading there the history of her future lot, and fearing nothing while she read, her golden hair, unthought of through the morning's strange adventures, parted at will upon her forehead, one half disposed in shining tresses over the pillow of the couch, the other wandering in careless ringlets across her burning cheek and snowy temples, and shrouding, as it were, with a veil of golden gauze, her neck and shoulders. It was not simply her inexpressible loveliness, never so



perfect as at this moment, for excitement and deep feeling had given a pathos to the expression of her countenance beyond what it usually wore ; but it was far more than this—the circumstance of her deserted state, the penury to which *he* knew that she was reduced, and the need she had of a protector—the hard unpitying world upon which she must be cast—the delicacy of her form and feelings, and her entire incapacity for coping with difficulties of any kind—it was a long array of circumstances and considerations such as these, which would have melted any other heart than that to which she was so fondly trusting. Yet there he sate, not altogether unmoved—that was impossible—but with his eyes turned from her beauty, calculating the chances and mischances which had thrown her thus upon his mercy, and which he saw too plainly had deprived her of the only substantial charm she ever had possessed for him—the prospect of inheriting a large portion of the Hatherstone property.

And all the while those eyes of softest blue were fixed upon his face—heavy with their tearful lids, but yet not doubting nor sorrowful ; rather looking as the sailor-boy would look, returning from his first voyage, on that line of shore beyond which he knew his mother's humble cot was standing. There was no doubt in those clear eyes, and from the full and parted lips—for she was listening, how intently !—the breath came gently, without a flutter or a fear.

Beautiful, and trusting, and cherub-like as was that fond appealing look, the man quailed under it, and wished himself away. He would have felt the basilisk's malignant eye more bearable. Rouse himself, however, he must, for every passing minute weighed against him, and made more difficult the words he had to utter, the meaning he had to convey.

"Lucy," said he at last; and the girl smiled, for he almost said it kindly, "it is high time that you and I should understand each other. A great change has passed over your fortunes and your prospects."

"It has, I know," sighed Lucy.

"Your father has proved himself a villain."

"Alas! I feared as much."

"Your mother is penniless, and your brother thrown a vagabond upon the world."

"But *you* always loved my mother, and Arnold is very clever."

"He has shame, disgrace, a blighted name to bear him down now. There is no standing against that."

"But *you* know him to be innocent."

"Your father's transactions have been altogether so dishonourable—nay, so guilty—that he has absolutely to fly for his life."

"My mother will feel it most. I am sure *you* will help me to support her."

"Many parties have suffered besides your own family. Old Mr. Hamilton has lost every farthing, and his son also is a beggar."

"Very shocking!" said Lucy, "very dreadful!" and by this time her voice had become so faint and low, that Frederick Ashley looked up in spite of himself. Her head had fallen back upon the pillow—the colour was fast flying from her cheek and lips. She had fainted under the agony of mind he was inflicting, though she had not once remonstrated, nor pleaded with him to spare her.

From a natural impulse which no one could have resisted, Frederick Ashley used what means were in his power to restore suspended animation, and by degrees the faintest tinge of red came back into the cheek; it seemed to come

by feeling the support of his strong arm, for no sooner had he placed it under the pillow, than a smile diffused itself over Lucy's whole countenance, and her soft eyes opened again, to gaze again into his face, still more intently than before.

"We are all ruined, did you say?" asked Lucy; and the smile gave place to a quivering agony of lip and brow.

"All ruined!" repeated her companion, "totally ruined!"

"But *you* are very rich, Frederick; everybody tells me so;—very rich, and very prosperous."

"Everybody tells a great falsehood, then."

"Still I think my mother and I should not be *very* burdensome."

"Lucy," said Frederick Ashley, starting to his feet, "I must speak plainly. I never yet have been in a situation to marry any one. I never have even spoken of marriage to you. It seems to me there is some strange misunderstanding on this subject in your mind. Perhaps the sooner I explain myself the better. You are my cousin, Lucy, and a very good girl; and I hope I shall always be willing to serve you in any little way that I can, as a friend; such as with the loan of a small sum of money, or anything of that kind. I am sure it will afford me the greatest pleasure to do so; and I don't mind, just now, if I write out a cheque for you for twenty pounds; you might find it very convenient at this crisis; but between you and me there must now be a great distance—greater than, I fear, you are prepared for, ignorant as you are of mercantile affairs. The fact is, no one can, consistently with his own interest, be known to have anything to do with your family now; and I being a relation, it is more

incumbent upon me, than upon some others, to hold myself distant—very distant indeed.”

Although Frederick Ashley delivered himself of what he had to say without much eloquence, and, as he intended and believed, in his mother tongue, he might as well have spoken in the language of the moon, for anything that his mute auditor appeared to comprehend, beyond one fact: *that* Lucy did understand at last; and though the conviction had come upon her slowly for some time, it burst like a thunder-storm now, scattering around her hopes, wishes, tender thoughts, and treasured recollections—all in one universal ruin, reduced in one short moment to a heap of ashes—black and dead.

She did not faint then: she lost no single thrill or agony of that stinging consciousness which flashed before her eyes, making her dizzy with too much light—restless and quivering with too much life. Her first impulse was to spring up from that couch—what business had she there? Away—away, out into the great world, to push, to beg, to starve!—that was her business now—anywhere but where *he* was; and letting the money he had so pressed upon her, slide from her hand upon the floor, she walked, erect, without a word, from the apartment; leaving him startled and confounded, as if a phantom had passed by.

With his accustomed self-possession, however, Frederick Ashley rang the bell for his servant, and ordered a carriage to be called instantly for the lady; and Lucy, yielding almost unconsciously to the importunities of the man, suffered herself to be detained in the hall, and then safely handed to the carriage, both the servant and the driver waiting to receive her orders where to go.

Lucy could not tell. Even had her faculties been more awake to what was passing, she might well have been at a



loss what to say. The men looked at each other; and just as Mr. Ashley's servant was about returning to his master, to ask for further directions, a woman of respectable appearance, but extremely anxious countenance, rushed forward, and setting her foot upon the step of the carriage, looked earnestly at the now shrouded and shrinking figure within.

"It's all right," said she to the driver, seating herself beside Lucy; and she then gave the man such direct and imperative commands where to drive, that he took for granted her assurance, and went on.

"Good gracious! only think that I should have found you at last!" exclaimed Betsy Burton, for it was that faithful servant, who had appeared at the exact crisis when help was most needed. "Only think!" she continued, talking to herself, and busily employed in adjusting Lucy's shawl, in drawing on her gloves, securing her bonnet, and discharging all those offices of kindness which had been so familiar to her when Lucy was a child.

"Don't trouble yourself to speak, dear." Lucy was not very likely to speak. "Things are not so bad. We've taken a first floor, and missis says it looks very much like home. To be sure the street's not much; but we only want to be private, and the people seem very quiet people, and Mr. Arnold knows where to find us; so we shall soon be altogether again. What a mercy that I came when I did, dear; for how would you ever have got there. See, see, the man's going wrong, after all. Down the first turning on the left, I tell you, and on behind the livery stables, through Clare's-court—there's room for one carriage; and when you get to the greengrocer's at the corner of Wyburn-alley, I'll tell you where to go next. Was there ever such a stupid man! He's taken us half-a-mile round, at least."

With these, and an infinite number of more minute directions, and a world of conversation with herself, in which she had the good sense not to require her companion to join, Betsy Burton at last succeeded in alighting with her fair charge at the entrance of an alley, along which she supported Lucy with her arms, until they reached a door to which she applied a key, without loss of time, saying as she undid the latch—"There, that's a comfort. I managed well to get the key, for it would never have done for us to stand knocking here, drawing all the people's eyes upon us."

Upon the whole, it was quite astonishing how many things Betsy found to be "quite a comfort." It was quite a comfort the people had carpeting on the stairs, though she must say it was about the ugliest she had ever seen; quite a comfort there was a good landing, for her great chest would stand there; quite a comfort—but now they were entering the little room, which her kindness and good management had obtained for the afflicted family; and really, but for the fact of their having been accustomed to so much better, the place, to use her own expression, "did not look so bad."

The sole occupant of this room was Mrs. Lee—calm and collected, and even dignified, under her great grief—so great that she saw not, heeded not, the nature of that shelter to which she had been conducted by her faithful servant; only that, from habitual consideration for other people's feelings, she now and then roused herself so far as to say, in response to Betsy's anxious solicitude to render everything agreeable—"Yes, very nice, Betsy—nobody could have managed things so well as you have done. We shall be quite comfortable—quite hap——" no; that word was too difficult to utter—too much like a mockery of the language of her heart.

It was only when left alone, that Mrs. Lee gave way to the natural force of her pent-up feelings. All the time of Betsy's absence, she had been pacing to and fro within the narrow precincts of that little room, until, at last, the space seemed too confined, and she went out upon the landing, and into the next bedroom, wringing her hands, and sometimes sitting down upon chairs that had no rest in them ; and then walking again, until her skirts caught the homely furniture, and tables were displaced, and things thrown out of order, which afforded her a momentary relief to put them right again. And so the time wore on. And then she stopped sometimes, and looked out of the small dark window—out upon the red tiles, and the smoky chimneys, and the little dark backyards, and mouldy rain-tubs, and the heaps of garbage gathered here and there, and the stray cat sitting on the wall, and captive birds in little cages that would persist in singing, as if in mockery of humane societies—all these she saw, and noted, strange to say, with wonderful perception of her outward senses, quickened now to tenfold vividness and life.

No sooner, however, did the voice of Betsy on the stairs announce her quick return, than Mrs. Lee assumed her wonted mastery of herself, and in her silent listening she distinguished two steps upon the stairs. It might be Arnold—it might be *him*, come back, repentant. Ah ! she did not yet know half his guilt, or she would never have regarded his return with anything but fear and horror. Not for herself alone. Her own existence seemed annihilated. It had been growing less and less important to her for a long time past. Yet she prayed not to have it taken, though she might almost have been excused for doing so ; for she had duties yet, and fond affections, and in the act of loving and supporting others, she found a second life.



It was now some days since Mrs. Lee had first become alarmed about her husband's circumstances. Arnold and she had shared their fears together. And when at last the ruin came, and with it shame and public notoriety, and furious reproaches, and strange confusion, amongst which nothing seemed intelligible but that her husband had absconded, having ruined many parties besides himself, the shock was altogether not more agonizing than had been their previous apprehensions. Mrs. Lee had yet to learn, that in pursuit of his one idol—Mammon, her wretched husband had gone on from step to step, at every fortunate turn more eager and insatiable, at every adverse movement in the affairs of trade or commerce, more determined to master his fortunes, and to be a man of distinction in the world of business, if not in reality a man of wealth. She did not yet know, that stimulated by this burning thirst, he had gone on from low expedients, cunning shifts, and questionable resources, until he reached the last and the most dangerous, and in an evil hour committed forgery,—not once but many times; and then he fled, not waiting even for prudent preparation, but away, like any thief, for well he knew the law was armed against him, and the hot pursuit was at his heels. Hence his need of money—money obtained at any cost, or how could he escape?—money, though his innocent daughter should become the victim of his greedy and devouring thirst.

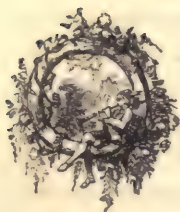
Amidst all the confused horrors which flitted before the dizzy sight of Mrs. Lee, during the few days alluded to, one pleasant thought alone remained to give her consolation. It was that Lucy was not there to see or feel their troubles. Safe under the shelter of her grandfather's protection, safe and happy there, the mother's heart turned fondly to her as the one bright spot amidst a world



of darkness ; and often as she prayed for strength, and patience, and right guidance through a sea of storms, she poured her spirit forth in gratitude for that dear child, kept harmless and in peace. For herself and Arnold, all seemed bearable, though bitter in the extreme ; but her sweet Lucy—her tender delicate one—she was not made for hardship ; and again, and yet again, she wept for very thankfulness that she was safe.

What, then, were the sensations with which the agonized mother beheld this delicate creature led into the room where she was seated. Speechless and very pale, the girl walked forward. But they came at last, those pent-up tears, and on her mother's bosom she wept long and bitterly ; and every one believed it was the wreck of fortune and the loss of home, and wealth, and friends, that made her weep so. Let them think so ; she had a grief too deep to be whispered even to her mother.

## CHAPTER XVI.



FTEEN is the observation made upon empires, and civilised communities, that as one falls into decay, and becomes extinct, another rises up, sometimes in the most unlikely quarter, and under the most unexpected circumstances. This is no less true of individuals, and of private families. For a while, it would almost seem as if the very touch of some persons turned everything to gold; and so far as the acquisition of money is regarded as the true standard of prosperity, such persons prosper, even beyond their own expectations, in everything they undertake. Most frequently, too, they prosper not only as individuals, but as families. If one branch does well in one line, another does better in another; thus increasing the ratio of their respectability as a whole, until they come to be generally acknowledged as rising families, and courted and looked up to accordingly.

Just in the same unaccountable manner, though often at a much more rapid rate, we see individuals and families overwhelmed, disappointed, and borne down in their worldly career. It is true this seldom takes place without some glaring dereliction from reason or right conduct on

the part of one or more of the parties concerned—something in the outset, which, if narrowly looked into, would serve to shew that prudence, good sense, or good principle, had been violated; and when a man falls from a condition of influence and prosperity, the world is not slow to portion out to him his *full share* of blame. So far, however, from judging correctly, when we pass sentence upon a sinking family, as being blameable in the exact measure in which they are assailed by misfortune, we often see that the parties who are dragged downwards by a falling man, are in reality the most exemplary and deserving; while those who are drawn upwards by a prosperous one, have as often no higher recommendation than what is called their *good fortune*.

And, perhaps, no circumstance, or combination of circumstances, in human life, has puzzled the contemplative mind more than this; perhaps none has given more pain to the disappointed and morbidly sensitive; perhaps none has excited more of the cavillings of infidelity, or the repinings of a *half* belief. “Everything prospers with him,” says the ill-advised, self-willed, or wrong-judging man. “Look at his children—unprincipled, overreaching, selfish, and greedy—everything prospers with them; while mine, because they will not do a dishonourable action, must starve.”

But instead of blaming divine Providence, or charging God foolishly for this,—in the first view of it, one of the strangest anomalies presented by the aspect of human existence,—how much wiser, how much happier would it be, could we all agree amongst ourselves to erect another standard of prosperity than that which has, more or less, deceived us all, and could we thus acquire the habit of looking upon wealth itself with less avaricious longings than

are generally bestowed upon it now. Nor would such an arrangement militate against the preconceived opinions of the great mass of the human family. On no one subject, within the whole range of human intelligence, is opinion more decided and unanimous than on this—that wealth is not the most substantial good, nor prosperity the highest; that health of mind and body, integrity, benevolence, the enjoyment of the social affections, freedom of action, and general intelligence, are blessings in themselves, of far greater importance in the aggregate of human happiness than the possession of mere wealth. We speak only of what the *world* in general is prepared to acknowledge, and does acknowledge, if we may believe its assertions, whether grave or gay; and especially that voice which speaks through the popular literature of the day,—all which would induce the cheering hope, that a time is approaching when the honest but fallen family shall no longer be regarded as less worthy than the family which has risen by questionable means,—when money shall be estimated only at its true value,—and when the admiring eyes of mankind shall be directed to something in itself more noble, than that outward prosperity which fails to dignify the mind.

On this point, however, the sayings and doings of mankind are so widely dissimilar, that, hopeful as the tone of our popular literature may be in this respect—hopeful as may be the general observations and conclusions gathered from society—hopeful as may be the rapid changes now transpiring in the world of business—the sudden uprising of some, and downfalling of others, without any proportionate, or at least obvious cause—hopeful as these signs of the times may be, for the substitution of a surer and a more enduring good to be aimed at than



that of mere worldly aggrandizement, or distinction—for it is not to rise *with* the mass that is generally aimed at, but to rise *above* the mass—to stand out from the common herd, and to be an object of envy amongst men and women, society, and near connexions; hopeful as these signs may be, we have yet to do with a state of things in which this higher good is not practically acknowledged as the *highest*. It is therefore our business to return to what the world is doing, rather than to what it is merely saying, and thus to add one more voice to the many; no matter how feeble, if it be true and in earnest, to prove that we are in a great measure the authors of our own miseries by serving a hard master, of whose uncertainty, falsehood, and injustice, we hear every day, and moreover, are fully convinced in our own minds.

Turning away for a short time from the accumulated misfortunes of a family around whom the darkest clouds of adversity appear to be gathering, it is but justice to the general current of human events—by which what is esteemed good, and what is esteemed evil, are widely, and as a whole, impartially, distributed—to direct our attention once more to the prosperous stream, and mark what gallant vessels are now gliding smoothly over its bosom, what ambitious spirits are now spreading sail before the favouring breezes, what beating hearts are now throbbing high with the hope of reaching some long wished-for haven.

Haven! there never yet was haven, or port, or place of rest and safety, reached by those who sailed on such a sea; but on and on, they go, impelled by the flow of a never-ceasing tide, no nearer the goal of their ambition at the end of a long life, than in the early morning of its hopes and wishes; on—on, without bound or limit to their course upon that wide rolling stream—on, without rest or

satisfaction, and at last without the power to say, "thus far will I go, and no farther."

But to look again at those with whom the tide was just turning. Long, indeed, did Mr. Dalrymple think it before he could discover the least symptom of a current setting in in his favour. Long did he wait, and often did he wonder whether his time would ever come; why so many who had no better qualifications than himself, got on before him; and to what quarter of the horizon he could direct his gaze, so intent, and so piercing, to discover the first streak of glowing light that was to usher in a more propitious morning.

It is more than probable, that Mr. Dalrymple cherished in the secret of his heart, some vague and indistinct assurance, fluctuating, no doubt, between hope and despair, that, some time or other, he would become a more important and distinguished man than in the early portion of his life. Less important and less distinguished he certainly could not be; he had therefore nothing in the world to fear; he could not fall. And the man who feels this is comparatively independent, free to choose his vantage ground, if he can but find it, wherever it may be; and free to use whatever means may fall within his reach, for improving his position or increasing the number of his resources. One leading fact was certain—he must expend nothing in outlay, for the best reason in the world—because he possessed nothing to expend.

We have seen what were his economical views with regard to the education of his only daughter. A sister out of a situation, and trained for a governess, was to do the teaching of this daughter in return for the shelter afforded by his roof and the refreshment shared at his table. Dorothy, as we have already described, had eagerly

anticipated this change in her circumstances. Like her father's fortunes, nothing could easily have made her condition worse, at least to her. Difficulties and trials she would have welcomed with enthusiasm, they would have been something to fight against, and overcome ; but the dead nothingness of her lot—it was that which rendered it unbearable. Whatever, therefore, her aunt and governess might prove to be, she was glad to make room for both characters in one, simply because that one would be *something*.

For some time after the entrance of the new inmate into the family, the interest excited in the mind of the wondering girl was kept alive by the hope of gratifying her curiosity. Her aunt had at least seen something of human life. With whom had she lived, and what kind people were they, were the constantly recurring questions by which her patience was wearied out ; and especially, the nearer such parties approached to the region of what is called high-life, the more intense was the eagerness with which Dorothy asked, and listened.

“ Did you ever see a duke ? ” asked Dorothy, one day.

“ Yes, many,” replied the aunt, very coldly.

“ Did you ever see a hero ? ” she asked, in a deeper tone, and with eyes that flashed fire, half concealed beneath their long raven lashes.

“ I don't know what you mean by a hero,” observed the aunt. “ I have seen Kemble on the stage, in *King Lear*, and Kean in *Shylock*.”

This was said as quietly, and with a look as unmoved, as if the speaker had only told of having seen the cabbages in Covent Garden market. But notwithstanding this indifference of tone and manner, indicating so truly the uniform flatness and stagnation of the mind on which the

trace of a hero had left no other mark than the cloak, the ermine, or the mimic crown of the stage, the mind of the young listener was gone—gone ; and with her head bent down, and her hands clasped, she sat thinking and pondering on some favourite theme, until at last she spoke ; for her ever restless thoughts, though falling upon those dull ears like water upon stone, were continually bursting forth beyond her own controul ; and “ Do you think I should succeed if I went upon the stage ? ” was asked with a look and manner which might almost have inspired a confidence of success, had the question related to an absolute impossibility.

“ No, certainly,” was the calm reply, “ not with those high shoulders of yours, and with your toes turned out. I wonder when you mean to finish that shirt for your papa. I was not engaged to make his shirts, while you sit idle, *that* I can tell you.”

“ Will you read something to me, then ? ” said Dorothy, grasping an armfull of impracticable linen—“ read me one of Shakespeare’s plays, while I hem this interminable hem.”

“ I shall read nothing so coarse and vulgar,” replied the aunt ; and thus Dorothy was obliged to fly again to her dreams—a dangerous occupation in connection with plain stitching, and no book ; and yet by good mothers of the past generation deemed wonderfully safe.

It is sometimes thought wonderfully safe too, by a generation not altogether past, to administer antidotes in the way of moral discipline ; thus a fiery temperament must be forcibly restrained, kept down, and shut up within itself ; an ambitious spirit must be humbled, galled, crushed ; a poetic genius must be curbed by common place ; a thirst for what is exciting or extraordinary, must be cured by



perpetual dryness, dust, and ashes. Upon this principle Dorothy Dalrymple was certainly in the way of completing her education under the most favourable circumstances; if education it could be called, which consisted of perpetual disputes and arguments, reprimands on the one hand, and resistance on the other; with an unceasing endeavour on the part of the pupil to overleap all preliminary measures, and jump at once into a position of brilliant success, making the world wonder at, and delight in, her extraordinary proficiency.

The question, however, with Dorothy, was not so much how shall I succeed in attaining this or that; but what shall I do with it when attained? Perhaps the whole aim and purport of her many wonderings and wishings, might be summed up in these few words, "when shall I come out a distinguished character?" Her aunt told her, never—that she had no one element of character to fit her for distinction; that her abilities were barely mediocre, her person plain, her ignorance too great to be ever got the better of; and altogether her disadvantages of such a nature as to counterbalance even the most stenuous and persevering efforts, had it been the habit of her life to make them. Yet, strange to say, though Dorothy would listen, with a powerful feeling of their truth, to these unscrupulous assertions, her courage was not daunted nor her spirit quelled; rather did she seem to rise with renovated energy from every new assault upon her hopes, and spring again up to some imaginary eminence after every attempt to crush and humble her to the dust.

Much of the secret of these ambitious aspirations lay in a natural love of art, an admiration of beauty and true excellence, wherever it could be found, and a conviction of the utter worthlessness of everything inferior, contemptible,

or poor. "Oh that I could sing! Oh that I could paint, model, or in short, do *anything well!*" was the frequent exclamation of the isolated and still ignorant girl; for she could not, would not, take the pains to learn after the accustomed and generally approved method. In vain did her aunt lay before her lithographic cottages to sketch, and, failing in these, put her back to rain-tubs, wheelbarrows, and buckets. "I will go to Rome, and copy the cartoons in the Vatican," exclaimed her pupil, contemptuously, as she tore up her meagre imitations, and threw her pencils into the fire.

We have already stated that whatever book learning Dorothy possessed, was derived from a heterogenous mass of loose volumes, collected, it might seem, from every quarter of the globe. Of these so many were single volumes of a set, that the merest glimpse of what she read about was all which Dorothy could obtain. Her father's library was rich in one treasure only—a complete Shakespeare, much torn and grievously mutilated to be sure, but still wanting in nothing material to the sense or spirit of the work. A history of the arts of painting and sculpture, with a short biography of the most celebrated artists, was another feast for the hungry mind of the young enthusiast, and one of which she never tired; it had sketches in outline too, of some of the principal works of art which have astonished and delighted the world; and hence, by constant and most untiring contemplation, did these dim shadowings forth of power, and grace and beauty, grow into her very soul, and become like a part of her own nature.

The last thing Mr. Dalrymple would have thought of, would have been to bring up his daughter for an artist; and yet with such a turn of mind it is probable she would have found her element in that sphere of occupation more

than in any other. But this turn of mind for a girl he held at once in contempt and terror, fearing the expensive consequences to which it might lead; and—"Get to your stitchery," was the constant reply to any application, which Dorothy might happen to make for means, however scanty or humble, towards pursuing the chief passion of her life.

It was not, however, in painting or sculpture alone that the imagination of the girl was accustomed to revel; "to have beautiful things around me," she used to say, "to listen to sweet music, to travel, to live in a Swiss valley! Oh aunt Anne!" and she would actually seize the placid spinster by her arms, or shoulders, and by her wild ebullitions of passionate excitement, put her, as the lady often said, in peril of her life. "Oh aunt Anne," she would then go on to say, "I would suffer—I would beg—I would almost burn, to be able to say—I possess something beautiful!"

"You!" the spinster would answer, drawling out the word, and accompanying it with a shrug and a sneer; "you, that cannot even repeat your multiplication table, to say nothing of your weights and measures!"

It was impossible for Dorothy to retain her gravity under the infliction of these *settings down*, as her aunt was pleased to intend them; and, as she was by no means ill natured, and less morbidly sensitive than passionate admirers of the beautiful most frequently are, this acme of incongruities, which her aunt and she were so well skilled in arriving at, was usually answered on her part by a peal of hearty laughter, and on the part of her aunt, by the silent unfolding of the twentieth pair of stockings to darn.

Whether it was some latent spark of real genius in the mind of Dorothy, struggling to burst its boundary, and to



manifest itself to the world ; or whether it was but a vague sense of the paramount desirableness of forcing herself into prominence and distinction, would have been difficult clearly to decide. That she wanted sufficient creative talent to enable her to excel, no one besides her aunt would have ventured to assert, seeing that she never made the fair experiment of taking those intermediate steps, which, to the born genius, are no less necessary than to the less gifted and the less aspiring. Nor was it in the graphic art alone that the taste and the fancy of the ambitious girl delighted to expatiate. In music she had the same thrillings of an inward consciousness, that perhaps she might be something—*something* ! oh how different from the tuneless, timeless, disturber of that old instrument, which she and her aunt had, with much difficulty, at last succeeded in obtaining the hire of at the lowest possible expense, and that only agreed for on consideration of its having been for some time entirely laid aside as incapable of further repair.

To have a piano, an actual musical instrument in her father's house, had appeared to Dorothy at one time as the perfection of earthly bliss. To go to it herself—to make sweet harmony with its charmed keys—to sing to it, for she felt that she *could* sing, or rather that she had the natural power ; such an accumulation of sources of happiness summed up in an extraordinary yet practicable fact, almost turned the dizzy head of the young aspirant, for some weeks before the treasure was obtained. But it came at last ; it nearly filled the little parlour where it found its destined place ; no matter, it was a piano, or at least it had been one ; and Dorothy sat down to “discourse,” as she thought, “most eloquent music.”

Alas ! even this was of no use, nothing was of any use,



for the intermediate steps between utter incapability and brilliant success, had still to be taken in everything to which her fondest hopes were turned ; and it was to these laborious steps that Dorothy had never yet either disciplined her will or directed her mind. As it was, she could sing a few familiar airs ; whether correctly or not she had but scanty means of knowing, yet such as they were, she sometimes made them ring through the house like the song of a happy bird ; and when the first process of learning to play was commenced, so immeasurably inferior to these " wood-notes wild," were the pitiful tinklings of that exhausted piano, that the spirit of the learner absolutely sunk within her, and she declared it impossible to learn music according to the accustomed method.

Sometimes, and not very seldom either, she fancied the fault must be in her aunt, and she looked round with her large, deep, searching eyes directed full upon the figure of the spinster lady, with an expression which, had it been interpreted, would have asked " Is it possible that any strains of music should ever come from you ? " and although, as often as she questioned, either by look or word, the real capability of her instructress, she was answered in a summary manner, " I was always considered to play with great execution ; " or, " I taught lady Arabella Bagshot ; " or some other fact was stated equally satisfactory and conclusive, the mind of the niece still remained unsatisfied, and she even ventured to assert, that unless her father would allow her to receive lessons from a fine whiskered Pole—an exiled nobleman of course—who went past the window every day to give music lessons in a neighbouring family, she never could, and never would, be taught to play in the usual manner.

" You will repent of it when it is too late," was the

accustomed reply of her aunt, on these occasions of perverseness and rebellion; "and under your circumstances," she would add, "it is really absurd, ungrateful, wicked, to neglect the charming advantages which have been so unexpectedly afforded."

"And what are my circumstances?" Dorothy would very naturally inquire.

"Not a penny to bless yourself with," was the comfortable reply; "and the necessity you will be under of providing for yourself."

"And what are my charming advantages?"

This question was asked with a look so arch, and a peeping sideways of those large black eyes, so truly inquisitive, that a character less grave than the spinster's would have found it difficult not to join in the hearty laugh which was sure to follow; but aunt Anne was so unfortunate as to see nothing to be amused at in all that was said, done, or implied, by the expressive looks, and scarcely more expressive words of her niece.

It was in this manner that time wore away—weeks, months, and years, unmarked by any greater event than the coming of a maiden aunt, half visitor half governess, of an old piano, and of a few—a very few, second-hand school books, declared to be absolutely necessary in the business of education. And with these events, some of which Dorothy had imagined so great in expectation, her own mind remained as unsatisfied as before. Whether it ever could have been satisfied with anything on earth, she probably never gave herself the trouble to inquire. All that she really knew on the subject, was this; that everything she had thus set her heart upon had grievously disappointed her; but yet her confidence was by no means shaken that something remained beyond, which could not

disappoint—something great, and wonderful, and exciting, she knew not what, nor had she learned to understand it by any other indication than the insatiable hunger and thirst of her own soul, which could not, or would not, feed upon the common aliment of ordinary beings.

And yet all around her was so common, so ordinary, that the whole range and variety of human experience could scarcely have afforded a situation so totally devoid of interest, as that in which she seemed to vegetate from year to year. Absolute poverty, with its extremes and sufferings, its ruggedness, its picturesque effects, its place in the world as a thing with a name, to be recognised and felt—poverty of this kind, known to her only in idea, she believed she could have borne much more contentedly than her own real lot. Nor, in all probability, was she mistaken in this belief, for poverty would have induced action, and action would have brought its own reward.

Amongst the few incidents which Dorothy Dalrymple regarded as indicative of some hopeful change in her circumstances, was the increasing frequency of her father's absence from home. A slight movement in the office began also to be heard at times from the rooms adjoining; and Bridget, the old servant, communicated the agreeable and interesting intelligence, that gentlemen, to her knowledge *real* gentlemen, knocked at the front door inquiring if master was at home. Indeed, putting together the few symptoms of approaching business which could be collected from knocks on the outside, and stirring feet, and men's voices within; adding to these, too, a dozen of wine ordered in, and a couple of handsome decanters sent home one day, an unusual demand for candles in the office, and paste to be made on the instant, and a greatly increased packet of letters brought in by the poor relation every



morning, Bridget was quite of the opinion that business was at last coming ; and, to use her own expression, " that it would come with a vengeance, when it did come."

A very different person from aunt Anne was this old servant of the family ; and notwithstanding her homely phraseology, and witch-like ugliness of face and person—notwithstanding the primitive nature of her personal habits, admitting no innovation of modern costume, from the thick cap with ample border which half concealed her dark brows, to the lindsey-woolsey petticoat which did no more for the lower extremity of her person, there was something about this uncouth individual much more in harmony with the mind of her young mistress, than she ever found in her companion by the parlour fire. One important recommendation was, that Bridget was full of hope, and that she saw nothing impossible which Dorothy chose to wish for, short of absolute wings. If a crown was the thing specified, Bridget would say it was as likely to come to her as other folks, for what she knew ; if money, everybody had their luck ; if distinction, Bridget was not very clear about that, but thought it not unlikely to be had by wishing, and waiting for ; and so on to the end of the chapter : everything but wings this hopeful creature saw no reason to discourage her young mistress in expecting ; and thus it was that Dorothy still liked better to trifle away her time in strange, wild talk with old Bridget, laughing heartily at the absurdities that were elicited, than in the monotonous common-place of her phlegmatic and unimaginative aunt, who never knew when anything was grotesque, nor smiled when circumstances turned out oddly, nor told a good story herself, nor heard one told by another party without asking gravely, " if that was all ?" but who seemed to spend her life in performing the office



of a wet cloth, laid heavily and with a sharp look out as to where it could be laid with effect, upon all aspiring hopes, warm feelings, and buddings forth of eccentricity, of whatever nature they might be.

It was indeed a loveless and unloved life which Dorothy Dalrymple was leading ; and we have to confess a strong conviction at variance with much that is written, believed in, and admired—that seldom, if ever, does a lovely, amiable, and unselfish character grow up amidst circumstances so entirely uncongenial to the growth of kindly and generous affections. It is easy in works of fiction to place fine and beautiful characters in strong contrast with everything that is foul and repulsive gathered around them ; and it is easy also, to make them look doubly attractive and interesting, by being thus presented to our notice. The question, however, very naturally arises—what can have made them so ?—what can have taught them to love, when, love has never been bestowed upon them ; to be generous, when they have received only the scraps and parings of other people's good things ; to return good for evil, when they have never seen the beauty of doing so exemplified in others ; of being just, and kind, and considerate, when they have never been taught the golden rule of doing to others as we would that they should do to us ?

That there are certain passive virtues to be found under such circumstances, it would be unreasonable to doubt ; such as non-resistance under oppression, and even patience under suffering and pain. But even here we are greatly afraid that Dorothy Dalrymple was sadly at fault ; and as to the more positive excellences already enumerated, these and many others of a similar description, we are greatly afraid also that she possessed in no higher degree, than that in which they had been exercised towards herself.

It is true that she possessed many strong qualities, many striking points of character, which under favourable circumstances might have rendered her both good and great, but in no one respect had these been cultivated, cherished, or made the best of; nor had she learned the noble lesson of making the best of them herself. Everything with her was still incomprehensible—everything unsatisfactory. She was scarcely conscious even of the natural yearning of a female heart, for something to love, and the credulous hope that *that* something would, somewhere in the world, in spite of circumstances, be found. All that she believed in, thus far in her experience, was something to be admired, but as yet everything was too small, too trivial, too commonplace, too poor. The great world was before her—the universe with its splendid mysteries, and its still more splendid revelations of truth—earth—heaven—eternity! To what particular point in this vast ocean of uncertainty was she to direct her search, or where was she to find the golden key to all these wonders? Her spirit danced upon the waters like a bark with every sail expanded, yet wanting ballast, pilot, compass—the plaything of the waves, the sport of every wind. Strong in itself, well trimmed, and well appointed, one fixed and worthy purpose might have saved it from shipwreck and ruin. But the dark hours have not come yet. The morning light is still upon the sails of that gay bark, bounding so merrily before the gale, so fearless, and so buoyant; whither is it going? The clouds that scud across the sky, the winds that whistle through the shrouds, the lashing billows with their foaming manes, each in its turn asks—whither?

## CHAPTER XVII.



THAT lapse of five or six years, already alluded to, as having wrought considerable changes in some of the characters and circumstances which form the subjects of our story, must be supposed to have effected the same natural transformation, from girlhood to womanhood, in the person and feelings of Dorothy Dalrymple. Not that she was yet a woman, only verging towards that often-wished-for state; and when she stood forward on the balcony, as has already been described, watching the triumphant entrance of her father amongst the shouting and applauding throng, who seemed determined to make him a hero, whether he would or not, it is probable that no maturity of reason or experience could have deepened the thrill of ecstasy with which her bosom bounded, as she received the congratulations of her newly-discovered friends—friends who, an hour before, were unconscious of her existence, but who were then crowding around her with every demonstration of admiration and respect.

Friends! It was the first time, in the whole life of that neglected girl, that the charmed name of friend had echoed in her ear with any sound in the remotest degree resem-

bling reality or truth. And now what had she done to be in an instant transported into an atmosphere of social enjoyment, breathing the blessed air of friendliness and cordial joy, with graceful forms administering to her comfort and convenience; and beings of mingled majesty and grace, and looks of intelligence and beauty, and voices of soft tones all harmonised to gladness, acknowledging herself—her poor neglected self—as the centre of attraction? No wonder the wild, undisciplined, and inexperienced creature was almost beside herself with surprise and excitement; no wonder she went home that day believing she had seen the world; nay, more, believing that the world had actually seen her.

It was but for a moment, however, that the bewildering pageant had flitted before her view; and it passed too rapidly to admit a sense of disappointment. For once, then, Dorothy believed she had been happy. And yet, when on returning home she endeavoured to relate all the circumstances to her aunt, just as they had occurred, the wet cloth was again most perseveringly applied to every point of ignition. But no matter—this time the fire burned on.

It is just possible, that had aunt Anne been of the party invited to occupy a place in the balcony that morning, the aspect of the whole affair might have worn a different colouring in her eyes: as it was, she augured no good from this sudden outburst of popular feeling; she saw plainly that Dorothy must have made a great simpleton of herself, that the whole company had been making game of her, and had no doubt whatever the end would be, that her brother himself would be *let in*.

In short, the overflowing and excited girl had no resource, on this occasion, but the very natural one of



opening her whole heart to the old servant, than whom a better listener could scarcely have been found. Once telling over was like nothing to old Bridget ; she scarcely got into the story until the third time ; and as to being weary, she would stand, with arms a-kimbo, no one ever tested how long, to hear anything that was likely to promote the honour of her master's house, interrupting the speaker no further than by a responsive wag of the head, and a most relishing click of the tongue, whenever the point of the story developed itself, or its interest was at the highest. Who could help describing to such a listener those bright omens of better times already beginning to dawn upon the Dalrymple family ?

While all this was going on in the humbler apartments of the house, there was a restless step pacing to and fro in those higher offices, and an eagle eye flashing brightly over reams of paper and rolls of parchment ; and words of playful sound and pleasant import were even spoken to that poor relation with inky fingers, such as he had never heard before, and such as evidently startled him as much as if a peal of bells had been rung beside his ear. Arrangements had recently been made for fitting up an additional range of apartments, with proper desks and tables, for the purpose of accommodating a greater number of clerks ; and already carpenters and other mechanics were anxiously soliciting the job, who a few months before would have been very shy about doing anything for Mr. Dalrymple, unless on condition of being paid in advance.

Very gratifying now were the looks of all the carpenters and workmen employed in the office — very obsequious the bows, as they listened to the gentleman's directions ; and very welcome were the sounds of the hammer, the

saw, and the plane, as they performed their respective duty, to some who listened with eager attention on the other side of the wall, wondering what could possibly be going on, yet inwardly rejoicing that something was likely to be transacted in that dull office at last.

Nor were these preparations for increasing business either premature or unnecessarily expensive. It was true enough that, at last, Mr. Dalrymple was beginning to rise—to rise into employment, notice, and distinction: but the money, the ready money, from what quarter was that to come? Already his demands were increasing—already there was something to keep up. Those who had taken him by the hand, and brought him forward, were entirely amongst the aristocracy and the gentry of the neighbourhood, with whom it was impossible to let himself down, and succeed. His very appearance, too, was in one sense against him: people *would* believe him to be a gentleman, and treat him accordingly. But worse than this was yet in store. His daughter had attracted no small share of attention on that eventful morning when she had been invited to witness the triumphant return of the successful party, after the assizes; and more than one attempt had been made to call upon Miss Dalrymple, though, fortunately for Dorothy, she was out every time.

On these eventful occasions, aunt Anne felt no doubt whatever but the compliment was intended for herself, and she had accordingly, with great condescension, invited her niece to accompany her in returning the calls; she might certainly, with the help of a very small share of penetration, have perceived, when she did so, that Dorothy was the chief, if not the only, object of attraction; but, totally blind to this view of the subject, she persisted in being Miss Dalrymple in her own person, and as such, con-

sidered herself justly entitled to every mark of respect, which under that title it was possible to claim.

Amongst the parties whose interests had been most substantially served by the successful issue of the trial, was a Sir James Crawford, whose residence was in the immediate vicinity of the town of M——; and this gentleman proved to be one of the warmest of Mr. Dalrymple's friends. Sir James was quite a man of business, more intent upon the improvement of his estate, than upon any point of etiquette, or fashionable distinction; and his good-natured lady so far fell in with his tastes, that she was remarkable for admitting to her parties many persons whose claim to her own rank in society it would have been difficult to substantiate. It is quite possible that the love of patronizing might have something to do with this amiable condescension: however this might be, those who were favourably noticed believed it had not; those who were neglected continued to maintain that it had.

Sir James Crawford himself was a hospitable, hearty kind of man, more frequently seen riding about on a favourite old pony, and directing the operations of his labourers and workmen, than mingling with society of his own rank in places of fashionable entertainment; but though he was a keen sportsman, and a great lover of the ease and liberty of a country life, he had also a quick eye to the rights of property, and no man would go further than he would to maintain his just claim to an acre of land: hence he was sometimes feared as much as he was respected; hence, too, his influence was in proportion to his power to carry any point upon which his mind was set; and while his urbanity in private made every one at ease around his plentiful and hospitable table, his sternness and determination, when set fairly against an enemy



or an encroacher, were such as rendered it a little perilous to be intimately associated with him in business.

There was but one sure way of carrying on such an intimacy without interruption; it was to yield everything to his judgment—to accede every doubtful point to his decision, and this not with servility, but with an appearance of being always candidly, rationally, and even independently, of the same opinion with himself. Mr. Dalrymple, then, was exactly the man he wanted, for he had an outward bearing the very opposite of sneaking or servile; he was a self-disciplined man too; he could wait without committing himself, to see on which side it would be safest to lean; nay, he could even manage himself so far as to have been of the right opinion long before the time of divulging it, so that when Sir James explained an idea, he had generally the satisfaction of finding that he had only given expression to some clear and practical view which had already been conceived in the mind of his talented agent.

Often did Sir James observe to his lady, how lucky he had been in finding out such a man as Dalrymple; and quite as often did the latter personage observe to himself, for he had no other confidant, that of all men in the world, he could not imagine one more serviceable for his purposes than Sir James Crawford.

"We must really invite that daughter of his some day," said the delighted baronet to his lady. "I wish you would call upon the girl."

And forthwith a handsome barouche was seen rolling along towards the part of the town in which Mr. Dalrymple resided, and a knock was heard at the door which sent Dorothy to peep sideways out of a chamber window, although never doubting, while she did so, but the applica-



tion, as usual, had relation only to her father's office. What, then, was her consternation on beholding two elegantly dressed ladies seated in the carriage, a servant in livery standing on the steps at the door, and the lady Crawford herself giving orders for a repetition of the knock.

"It's a carriage full of ladies," shouted Bridget at the bottom of the stairs.

"Bring me my black satin dress," screamed aunt Anne.

"Tell them we are not at home," exclaimed Dorothy.

"But you *are* at home," remonstrated Bridget.

"They are calling on me," said aunt Anne, from the top of the stairs. "Show them into the parlour and bring me my dress."

But a second, and a louder knock, put an end to the parley on the stairs; and Bridget, wiping her hands on her blue apron, prepared to discharge her part of the duty, come what might.

"Don't let them in, whatever you do," said Dorothy, now half-way down, and bent upon making one more effort. "Don't let them in," she repeated with a voice that might have been pleading for life or for death; but already the Rubicon was past, Bridget had slipped the bolt, and the soft rustling of silks which seemed to fill the narrow passage was heard, while a sweet perfume rose upon the air, and musically toned voices asked if Miss Dalrymple was at home.

"Of course I am," said aunt Anne, whose neck had been stretched over the banisters; and with this pleasant observation made to herself, she laid hold of the black satin dress with her own hands, so skilfully applied, that with the assistance of her mute and perfectly astounded niece, she was soon ready to flounce down

the stairs, and in at the parlour door, leaving poor Dorothy behind in a state of consternation beyond what she had ever before experienced. One idea alone flashed quickly across her mind with a touch of consolation in it. Her aunt was quite equal to an interview of this kind, being in her person and manners by no means an ill-bred woman; but the little parlour—the old chairs, and the dingy carpet, how did these familiar objects, with their meannesses and imperfections, all glare upon the eye of Dorothy's mind at that moment.

The interview did not last long; and Dorothy, with palpitating heart, still listening, wondering, and waiting, heard, first the ring of the parlour bell—could it be for herself? and then the opening of the door, the rustling of the silks again, the sweetly modulated voices, saying, “on Friday week, then, if you will be kind enough to convey my message to Miss Dalrymple,” then Bridget sidling about in the lobby, not at all knowing what she was to do or say in answer to the parlour bell, then the opening of the outer door, the trampling of horses' feet, the roll of wheels, and all was gone.

“I never saw anything like it!” exclaimed aunt Anne in her most acrimonious tones, as she swept along the passage on her retreat back to the stairs. “I never *did* see anything like it in my life. I suppose it was owing to my not being introduced; and yet I told them as plainly as words could tell, that I was Miss Dalrymple myself.”

“What is the matter?” inquired Dorothy, seeing her aunt in this dismal plight; and for the first time, beginning to feel sufficiently at ease to be a little entertained. “What is it,” she repeated, “and who are they, and why did they come here?”

For some time aunt Anne would not explain anything,

but pouted, and tossed, and wished she had never put on her black satin ; and blamed Bridget for being an old fright ; and Dorothy for being young and awkward, and not introduceable ; and herself for not having spoken out more plainly than she did. Indeed, she began to think it would be best to write to Lady Crawford, and state exactly how the case stood ; she was sure her ladyship would be very sorry afterwards to have made such an unaccountable mistake.

But by this time Dorothy had begun to laugh, as the whole affair became intelligible to her, only she suddenly checked herself as she recollected that if the message left by the ladies did not really apply to her aunt, it might possibly apply in a quarter, the bare probability of which filled her with alarm.

By dint of coaxing, and complimenting, the whole truth was at length elicited. Lady Crawford was about to have a party—just a party of young friends ; and by way of making sure of Miss Dalrymple, had called herself ; indeed she had intended calling for some time past, and hoped the lady to whom she addressed herself would say everything that was kind for her to Miss Dalrymple, and above all apologise for the familiarity with which she had come in person to engage her for Friday evening.

Nothing could have been more gratifying than this, had it been addressed to the right person ; nothing could have been more condescending, or complimentary ; nothing could have been really more considerate, for had Dorothy herself been present, she would have felt so encouraged and assured by the manner of this kind-hearted lady, as to have been spared half the apprehensions which now agitated her breast.

“ And must I really go ? ” said the wondering girl to her aunt.

"You had better consult your father about that," replied the spinster. "I confess that to me it does not seem possible."

"And pray, why not?"

"You have nothing to put on, in the first place."

"But you forget, there is a whole week to prepare in."

"In the next place, you don't know how to conduct yourself."

"But I shall see what other people do."

"Yes, and while you are watching most probably you will stumble over an ottoman, or tread upon Lady Crawford's dress."

"Or fall on my face in the middle of the floor."

"Extremely probable."

"I should attract attention, at all events, and that would be something."

Altogether it was evident that Dorothy was by no means disposed to give the matter up; and on consulting her father, he was decided in the opinion that so favourable and flattering a chance ought on no account to be thrown away.

"Perhaps you are not aware of the expense of an entire outfit," suggested the aunt, "ornaments, and everything."

"Pshaw—nonsense," said Mr. Dalrymple; "a lady's dress costs nothing; and you could lend the girl a trifle or two. I don't mind advancing a few shillings myself, for such a purpose. Or, now I think of it, go over to Pennington's. The people are mighty civil to me just now. You can order anything you want there, only on no account exceed fifteen shillings, or a pound."

"Fifteen shillings or a pound," exclaimed the aunt, with uplifted hands. "Fifteen pounds would not make



her fit to be seen. You forget what an object the girl is herself."

Almost for the first time in his life, Mr. Dalrymple turned upon his daughter an approving—almost an admiring look. She felt it, and her courage rose. "Father," said she, stepping forward and holding out her hand, 'give me just three pounds, and you shall not have occasion to be ashamed of me."

There was something in her look, her manner, and the tone of her voice, as she said this, which commanded confidence. She was no longer a child, but a woman; and while her dark eyes flashed with an expression which went to her father's very soul, for *there*, at least, the language she spoke found an echo; while her haughty head was thrown back as if to repel the humiliating insinuations of one who could not by any possibility understand her; she cast herself upon her father's generosity, with a daring which at once ensured his respectful attention to her wishes.

How strange that this bold and unwonted effort should in an instant have produced an effect, for which tears and supplications might have been tried in vain. Yet so it was; the sum which Dorothy had demanded was placed in her hand, and she was to be made presentable in a party, by the expenditure of three pounds.

"Poor thing," said Bridget; "I only wish it had been five, and we would have sent you out like a lady, for once."

"For once?" repeated Dorothy, laughing. "I declare Bridget, you are almost as insulting as my aunt. Perhaps I shall astonish you both, and be a lady yet; not once, but always."

"I should'nt wonder," said the old servant, gazing

intently upon the object of her increasing interest ; “ with that raven hair tied up, and your shoulders kept in, and your toes turned out ; ” and Bridget, with her broad squat figure, raised her short skirts a little higher than usual, and stood exactly in the attitude she was so anxious to recommend to her young mistress, as that which would be her passport into the best society, all the world over.

“ Exactly,” said Dorothy. “ When I can do that, Bridget, I shall be accomplished indeed. But in the mean time, I want shoes, silk stockings, kid gloves—and she counted so many items on her fingers, that the three pounds would have failed to cover a tenth part of the necessary outlay ; and thus she became still more busy, striking off what it was possible to do without.

It was soon quite evident, however, that without the assistance of her aunt, and without a considerable stretch of her generosity too, Dorothy would never be equipped, even in a barely creditable manner, so extremely meagre and scanty was the customary supply of her wardrobe ; and as the eventful hour drew near, the nicest calculations, and the most delicate attentions, were alike necessary to keep the temper of the spinster lady so far propitious as that she might be depended upon for an ally, rather than an opponent. Most certainly Dorothy had never been so undeviatingly kind and conciliating to her aunt, for any whole week before ; and all that her playful fancy could devise, was in urgent requisition to humour the little—the *very little* vanity which it must be acknowledged that the good lady possessed.

Never, in the humble establishment of Mr. Dalrymple, had anything like the present excitement and bustle been experienced before ; and never, but for the unwonted cordiality and good will of the maiden aunt, would such

a state of things, upon the whole so satisfactory, have been experienced at all. Next to oneself, it is something to have one's relations brought into notice; and, failing in the one great object of her ambition, aunt Anne, with most unexpected generosity, at last fairly came round, and consented to the opening out of her own secret store of hoarded treasures,—“none the worse,” as Bridget observed, “for seeing the light, and getting an airing, once in a lifetime.”

Hoarded, however, as these treasures had been for years—the careful gleanings of many families, in the way of cast-off ornaments, and dresses which had been seen in public too often to bear to be seen again, and all made much of by the givers, as if emanations of pure generosity—all these were searched into, and in many instances, displayed to the wondering eyes of Bridget and her young mistress; the former making many excuses to enter the enchanted chamber of exhibition, and edging out sideways when she did go at last, with her eyes still upon silks and gauzes, feathers and lace, and her person gradually moving backwards, as if she retreated from royalty itself, in order that she might not lose a single glimpse of anything that could be seen. It was altogether like a preparation for some theatrical exhibition, so heterogeneous were the different articles brought to light, so remote in their origin and construction were some of them from the habits and fashions of the existing period, and so far were they all from the slightest hope of adaptation one to another.

But what would have been utterly worthless and contemptible to almost any other lady dressing for a similar occasion, was to the artistic eye of Dorothy Dalrymple a thousand times more interesting than the most perfect

exhibition of a fashionable *modiste*. Out of these extraordinary materials she could construct herself as many characters as there were turbans, feathers, or wreaths of faded flowers; and instead of setting about, with common thread and needle, to stitch together what was absolutely necessary for the all-eventful Friday evening, she was perpetually fitting upon her own head and person whatever could by any stretch of her fancy convert her into a heroine; and, regardless of the sarcasm of her aunt, exhibiting before a very contracted mirror the air and manner which appeared to her imagination best suited to the costume she had assumed.

“Ah! if it was but for the stage!” she murmured to herself more than once, to the astonishment and indignation of her aunt, who failed not to respond by, “A pretty mess you would make of it—you, who don’t know how to go into a room!”—and here followed a very learned, and by no means inappropriate, dissertation upon the management of the hands and feet,—the carriage of the head and shoulders,—the advance forward,—the retreat,—the tone of the voice, especially what to say when spoken to,—and, in short, all the minutiae comprehended under the all-important description of deportment and address.

And Dorothy, who neither heard nor heeded a word of the whole matter, was just as wise when her aunt had finished, as when she began. “All that,” thought Dorothy, “will come of itself;” and trusting to her own great spirit to carry her through, and to her natural penetration and tact, of which she possessed no trifling share, she positively refused complying with the practice which her aunt would have imposed upon her, of walking into the little parlour every day, as if she was entering



Lady Crawford's drawing-room, and advancing towards her aunt, as if she had been that lady herself.

"No," replied Dorothy, when remonstrating against these experiments. "If I am to get through the evening creditably, I must not make a simpleton of myself before I go. If I am ever to be anything in the opinion of others, I must not sacrifice my own self-respect."

And this unusually rational speech of Dorothy's was made with that peculiar air and manner which had recently commanded even her father's confidence and admiration. It seemed indeed as if the girl was rising into a woman, nobody could tell how, for she had neither learning or accomplishments, and least of all experience, to fit her for the character which it now seemed almost as if she could assume at will. Old Bridget said it was the *nature* that was in her, that she had all along believed it was there ; and perhaps she was not far wrong.

But the eventful evening came at last ; and none who had seen Dorothy Dalrymple give the last approving look in her glass, would have believed it to have been the first time she had ever dressed for a party. With a good taste, and a quick perception of form and colour perfectly natural to her, she had been determined in one important point, not to be *over* dressed. Of the existing fashions she knew but little, or of what was worn or not worn by girls of her age ; but in keeping with her bright black hair and eyes, she took care to have a considerable amount of black about her person, relieved only, and very sparingly, by one strong colour ; and when her cheeks became flushed with the unusual excitement of the occasion, and she came down into the parlour to announce to her father that she was ready, a sudden thrill of gratified pride made him actually bow to the striking figure which advanced towards

him, while he offered his arm to conduct her to the door with as much respect as if she had been the most distinguished visitor.

Nor was Dorothy insensible to the effect produced by this sudden change in her appearance, and with that in her manner; a pleasant thrill ran through her frame, her step became more dignified, her movements more calm and graceful, though all the while an inward fluttering kept up the glow upon her cheek; the flash of her dark eyes, and the flitting smile which occasionally exhibited her white teeth, making her altogether, if not exactly handsome, one of those strikingly interesting figures which sometimes prove a thousand-fold more attractive than the most perfect beauty.

Of all the visitors admitted into Lady Crawford's drawing-room that evening, perhaps there were none whose appearance looked less out of place than Mr. Dalrymple and his daughter. As the gay moments glided by, it must be confessed that sundry difficulties arose, and that Dorothy for some time clung to her father with absolute terror of being left alone; but every instant her quick eye was making some discovery, and by the time the rooms were filled, she was actually carrying on a conversation with two or three gentlemen on her own account.

Happily for her, and perhaps for many others similarly circumstanced, conversation of this kind requires about as little effort as any act of human life—as little knowledge—as little thought—as little previous preparation of any kind whatever; even Dorothy herself was surprised to find how very easy it was to converse with gentlemen at a party; and as she expended a good deal of originality, of point, and of cleverness upon what she said, it was just so far an improvement upon conversation generally; and the

gentlemen became delighted with their companion in proportion as she roused up any dormant faculties which they might have of their own, or afforded them real entertainment.

It is a delicate secret, that of being attractive and charming in company; some people think it requires beauty, or knowledge, or eloquence in the speaker: it requires no such thing, it is true that beauty brings the hearers near, but it does not keep them. Some people think it requires the speaker to be clever in herself, or agreeable, or interesting; instead of which it requires only that she should, with nice and delicate tact, so address herself to others as to make them feel *themselves* clever, agreeable, and interesting; and that will please and gratify them infinitely more, than by displaying the most brilliant or extraordinary powers of her own.

Dorothy Dalrymple, in the space of one short evening, discovered this, and the discovery placed in her hands the use or abuse of a power over others, with which nature had gifted her in no common measure. Possessed of this power, and rejoicing in its possession, she was already beginning to feel as much at ease in those brilliant apartments as in her father's house, when suddenly her equanimity of mind was disturbed by the approach of Lady Crawford and a party of her friends, with a proposal for dancing in the adjoining room.

By some strange inadvertence dancing had been entirely left out of the calculations and directions of the careful aunt, in preparing her niece to conduct herself through the most eventful evening of her life. Dorothy had never learned to dance. Not many hours before this, she had made a speech of some weight on the subject of not sacrificing her self-respect, but what was she to do now?



It would be safest and most wise for us all to say little about self-respect, when we begin to step into any place for which we are not fitted. What was Dorothy to do? Lady Crawford, who had previously been struck with her appearance, was still more pleased to find that the nameless girl whom she had thus ventured to bring forward, and whose humble home it must be confessed had not been observed without considerable apprehension, was regarded by all with favourable notice; and, that, so far from being a mere blank in the evening's entertainment, for that was the most that could have been expected, she was actually becoming an object of very considerable attraction, so much so that many gentlemen were anxious to have the honour of dancing with her; and lady Crawford, in consideration of her diffidence and youth, was already graciously offering her arm to conduct her to the adjoining apartment.

Alas! poor Dorothy, she was weak and poor, as all must be when standing on a false foundation; but if she was weak in principle, and poor in the necessary qualifications for actually being what she appeared; she was strong in self-possession, and rich in subterfuge and tact.

In an instant Dorothy Dalrymple was afflicted with a sprained ankle. Pleading earnestly with Lady Crawford, she did assure her ladyship that she had suffered immensely—was suffering still; and though, as some one remarked, she had walked into the drawing-room like a queen, she had suffered even from that, and began really to be afraid whether she should be able to walk at all before the evening was over.

Here a slight twinge of pain, as Dorothy moved the afflicted foot, was indicated by a very charming laugh, and the gentlemen, struck with the most profound com-



passion, busied themselves to administer relief, some insisting that the foot should be laid up in spite of all remonstrance on the part of Dorothy, who, in that humiliating moment, could almost have done anything to call back her self-respect—anything, but disclose the manner in which it had been lost.

Perhaps it was well for Dorothy's scheme that her father had previously left her, and was at that moment busily engaged in the library, in a manner rather more to his taste, with Sir James and some of his friends. Whether Lady Crawford understood the case or not, she moved quietly away without further remonstrance; and Dorothy, left to her admirers, was compelled to submit to the humiliation of having her foot placed carefully upon a white velvet ottoman, and of having it watched over as if it had been a slumbering child.

After all Dorothy was, perhaps, more entertained than humbled; for it must be confessed that her sensibility was by no means equal to her talent. Her chief trouble arose out of certain flitting apprehensions lest her father, taken by surprise, should mar all by expressing his astonishment. Mr. Dalrymple, however, was a safe man upon the whole; and when he came at last, to offer his arm to conduct his daughter to *their carriage*, he only looked a little strange, but said not a single word. So much for the self-respect which belongs to a determined *creeping* on towards distinction!

## CHAPTER XVIII.



IF it be true, as we are all apt to believe, that calamities are so dispensed as seldom to come alone, the amount of affliction being still the same, how merciful is that arrangement by which the edge of one trial is thus brought in contact with another, and the sharpness rubbed off, so as to render the actual suffering not greater than of one single calamity pressed upon the spirit, with all its poignancy and magnitude alone. Thus, when we speak of a person being weighed down by an accumulation of misfortunes, we sometimes commiserate the case of one who is stunned, confounded, and almost stupified by the rapid occurrence of events, no one of which has left sufficient time for feeling exactly what it was, in all its bearing upon his own circumstances and position.

The present situation of the ruined family of the Lees, might be described very much in this manner. It is true that certainty had now taken the place of long and anxious apprehension; but that certainty branched out into so many horrors, that as yet they scarcely knew which was the most terrible to contemplate.

We have already stated that there were some members

of the household whose minds were in a great measure prepared for any calamity of a pecuniary nature which would be likely to occur; and of these, Betsy Burton had been the most apprehensive, and the most upon her guard. Perhaps she had also the darkest suspicions respecting the character of her master; for ever since the evening walk with her brother James, in the neighbourhood of the reputed miser's dwelling, her mind had been haunted by strange misgivings, which troubled her the more, because there was no human being to whom she could, with any propriety, communicate her fears.

As if to perplex and harrass her still more, her brother had lately been an urgent applicant for a fresh loan of money. It is true the former loan had never been repaid, nor was very likely to be, seeing that he was on the eve of being, what Betsy called, "sold up;" but he had now so fine a thing in prospect, so lucky a chance, so desirable an opportunity of stepping into a position of making an excellent living for his large family, that with the assistance of even so small a sum as twenty pounds, he believed he should very soon be able to pay the whole amount back into his sister's hands.

To this often repeated statement, Betsy's uniform reply was—"Don't tell me about any more lucky chances. I'll see the luck proved, first."

And so she had dismissed her brother in a very hasty manner, for her mind was full of other things, on that eventful evening on which Lucy met her father in the garden at Hatherstone.

Indeed Betsy Burton was so accustomed to the pleading of her brother for help, which she too well knew would do him no real service, seeing that he had plunged into the downward current of matrimony, that she had no very

great amount of sympathy left for his never-ending troubles ; and her manner on this particular evening had been, as he observed, " so out of the way sharp, and unsisterly," that the tears actually trickled down his face, as he slowly retraced his homeward steps.

It is just possible there was something in anticipation at the end of his walk, which affected him quite as keenly as his sister's harshness. Whatever had failed of all James Burton's worldly calculations, the spirit and temper of his wife were not amongst this class. Nay, with every added cherub to his household bliss, he even thought that she grew " sharper—more difficult," as he expressed it ; and certainly she had sent him out that evening with a threat which still tingled in his ears, to be executed in case he returned without the loan of money.

Mrs. Burton was in fact a woman of aspiring genius, always looking upward, and that in the most extraordinary manner. Nothing daunted by a failure, she only regarded it as a thing to be managed by some clever attorney ; and if only certain parties could be brought over to be a little accommodating, so as to let her husband have a fair start again, she saw no reason why he should not, by the help of a little ready-money, take even a better position than he had held before ; more especially as there was near them a small inn or public house to be disposed of, in which, if they could only be once located, she already saw herself figuring as the queen of steaks and flaggons, with *good things* perpetually at her disposal.

Like many other people, Mrs. Burton looked upon a failure as a thing to be got through with, and if not got through with comfortably, it was all the fault of those unreasonable and requiring parties who were ill-natured enough to persecute them for money which they had not



in hand. If once things could be "settled," so that nobody could "come upon them," Mrs. Burton was prepared to consider herself an independent woman, ready to make a fair start in life again.

More than half persuaded by the arguments of his stronger, if not his *better* half, James Burton had used the same form of language, in speaking of these circumstances to his sister. But her summary way of describing a failure in business, with debts that could never be discharged, had so crushed his spirits, and wounded his always susceptible feelings, that he found himself, on the evening in question, very much tempted to step into a way-side house, where sounds of boisterous hilarity assured him there were persons in the world fortunate enough to have no cares, or rather, to be able to drown what cares they had.

Altogether he was in a miserable, desponding state of mind ; looking this way and that ; ready for any hope, or even any alleviation to his sufferings, from whatever quarter it might come. It seemed to him that his present existence was suspended between two extremities equally terrible to encounter. He had been driven away from his sister's presence ; and to return home to his wife with tidings of ill-success, was to bring about him such a storm as he felt that he had no strength to sustain.

"And yet how many people," said James Burton to himself, "have money enough, and to spare ; how many people have no use for their money, and here am I with a wife, and one—two—three"—and he counted up his precious offspring on his fingers, with a fresh gush of tears for every one—"hungry babes," he added, "and their mother such a hearty woman ;" and he leaned his head against a wall, unable from the poignancy of his feelings to proceed,

until warned by passing feet that perhaps his attitude and manner might attract unwelcome attention. At last he turned into another road which was more private, and more in unison with the temper of his mind. Here dwelt the old miser, of whom James Burton had often heard. Curiosity and wonder prompted him to linger near the spot; for "what," under present circumstances he was more than ever disposed to ask, "could possibly induce any one to hoard up money without attempting to turn it to some good account?"

In fact, this particular, and otherwise unattractive spot, had possessed a kind of fascination for James Burton, ever since the occurrence of that mysterious scene which he and his sister had witnessed there; and though repeatedly charged by her not to mention what he had seen, although accustomed on all occasions to pay the utmost respect to her injunctions, he had been unable so far to overcome the natural inclination which most persons feel to make out a stirring story from their own experience, that he frequently betrayed, by words, and looks, and certain strange insinuations, that he knew more about the reputed miser than was generally known. What he did know, he never ventured so far as to disclose. Perhaps it would have been safer for himself if he had.

"That any one should keep their money in a garden!" sighed James Burton, as he applied his eye, not for the first time, nor the second either, to the chinks in that old broken door. "That any one should live in such a place as this, and money at their disposal! I wonder now whether, if I should really get into the old man's house, and make bold to ask, he would lend me a few pounds. Perhaps he would—perhaps he would be even glad to help a poor neighbour if he did but know how. I am sure I

should, if I was in his place. And if I told him about Emma, and the children, very likely his heart would melt. I am sure mine has melted a thousand times."

As James Burton turned over these thoughts in his mind, his hand was busy, almost unconsciously to himself, in feeling for the rude fastening of the door, which usually consisted of a number of pieces of string and threads of matting, wrapped round and round a broken latch, so that although one strong blow might at any time have loosened the crazy fabric, it would have required a considerable length of time to loosen these strange fastenings in a more methodical manner. On this evening, however, James perceived, to his infinite surprise, that they had been already loosened, and were only so arranged as to appear to hold the door, without any real security. Wonder is always near akin to curiosity, and the next thing James Burton thought of doing, after he had made this discovery, was actually to look in. First then he glanced around him to ascertain that nobody was near ; and then pushing gently at the door, he found that it yielded to his touch without the slightest difficulty. Once having set his foot within, he felt that to enter the garden and close the door after him, would be the wisest and safest plan, in case of any traveller passing by ; and the next moment he was standing within the enclosure, with the door again closed, and his figure effectually screened from observation by the masses of overhanging ivy which crept about the mouldering walls.

Like many other weak and wavering characters, James Burton did many things without asking himself why ; and certainly this was one. Yet there can be little doubt that he was actuated by a vague notion, that if he could by any possibility obtain an interview with the occupant of



that tenement, so as to lay his case before him, he might obtain help.

We have already stated that James Burton had been accustomed to feel as if there was a sort of fascination about this place; and he now persuaded himself that it was for some especial purpose—some good fortune to himself and his family, that he had first been “directed” there, as he called it. And, since that eventful night, he described himself as having never felt towards it as he did to any other place. Something seemed to shoot through him sometimes, he said, as he passed by that garden door. He often felt, too, as if he must go out of his way to obtain another peep into the old garden; and, altogether, he did not believe such feelings came of themselves, or meant nothing. At all events, he was here to-night he hardly knew how; and since it had come about that he was actually within the walls of the garden, he might as well look about him a little, and see if there was any likelihood of money being buried there—anything resembling a hole in the ground where it was deposited; for report went to say that it all lay at the foot of a cherry-tree, where the old man was sometimes seen digging.

“There’s his spade, however,” whispered James to himself. “I wonder, if I was to turn a bit of the earth up, whether he would ever find it out. If he did, he would keep his own counsel; for nobody would tell, in a case of that kind, where their treasure was to be found.”

Upon this impulse, strange as it was, James actually took the spade, and began to apply it gently to the surface of the ground around the tree; not, however, daring to turn up sufficient earth to serve any purpose in the way of discovery. But as he did this, his ear was startled by sounds within the house, of a nature which he would



little have expected in so solitary a place, where the occupant was known to live entirely alone. His first thought was to throw down the spade, and escape from the spot as quickly as possible; but curiosity again got the better of his prudence, and he even advanced with stealthy step a little nearer to the house. It seemed, indeed, as he often said to his wife, as if that place had a power over him, which he could not resist; and he had not even yet admitted the idea, that it might be a power for evil, and not for good.

“What can they be about?—and who in the wide world can it be?” asked James Burton of himself, as he stood sideways, and crouching under the ivy where it crept nearest to the house. “I should n’t be surprised if there’s some one going to do a mortal injury to the old man; and now, if I should rush in to his rescue, would n’t he be grateful, and leave me all his money?—and so the thing would come about without any asking of mine.”

It is curious how some weak and uncertain characters, buoyed up by hopes and wishes never brought to the stern test of reason, can think and even talk about “things coming about,” which are expected to turn out favourably to themselves. It is curious too to see what an immeasurable range their belief can expatiate in, unbounded by possibility and fact; for at the very worst of their fortunes “things may yet come about;” the brazen skies may open, and the bright sunshine pour upon their path; the barren desert may grow fertile, and bear sweet blossoms and rich fruit. Is it not curious, also, to observe how near are the too extremes of the utmost folly of the foolish and the highest wisdom of the wise!

If to hope on through all things, alike against reason and against the uniform tendency of his worldly career,

could have entitled this individual to a place amongst the wise, he might certainly have claimed a niche by the side of any celebrated sage, whether of ancient or modern times; for no reproaches of the sharp-toned Emma, no increase of consumers around his table at a fearful disproportion to the thing consumed, no other catastrophe or accident in his affairs, but left James Burton the possession of his secret and indefinite hope; the more enduring and inextinguishable, because it was indefinite, and referred to nothing which could possibly be specified except to the coming about of things which never came, and therefore still remained to be the subjects of hope.

It is true that this hope was definite in one respect. It pointed undeviatingly to worldly prosperity; and thus it was that out of the wretched materials of the miserable miser's dwelling, James built himself a tenement of brick or stone; thus it was, too, that he listened, and listened still more eagerly, to what would have driven a less hopeful character away. Had he been a bolder man, he would even now in all probability have made his presence known to those who were within the house, so entirely was his mind possessed with the idea of rendering some signal service to the reputed miser, and so strong was his conviction that the miserable and apparently friendless being was at this moment driven to some fearful extremity by an enemy more powerful than himself. Constitutional timidity is, however, an unfailing impediment to action in cases such as these, where any forward movement is sure to be attended with an explosion of feeling of some kind or other, if not with actual danger to life and limb. The very sound of a violent and angry voice was to James Burton much like the sharpening of steel weapons; and he would as soon have thought of plunging into a den

where a band of infuriated insurgents were preparing their iron pikes, as of breaking in upon disputants whose violence found utterance in language such as now escaped from the interior of the dwelling.

A bolder man than James, however, might well have been excused for shrinking closer and closer to the wall, at the remotest part of the garden ; for while he stood listening, and endeavouring to catch the meaning of what was said, a sudden rush was made towards the door, from the interior of the house ; a bolt was hurriedly undrawn, and, before he had time to effect his passage through the door of the garden, before he had time so much as to think about his own safety, the figure of an aged man was visible, struggling to make his way out of the house ; while a younger and more agile figure pursued him with a speed which left no chance of escape. In another moment the old man was seen falling forward upon the ground with a violence which threatened his life. It was then that the younger man, almost leaping over his prostrate antagonist, laid hold of a purse or bag of money, which had been the cause of that fearful strife. It had been closely—terribly grasped ; but the struggle was soon over. The muscles of the aged man relaxed, his eager hand was wrenched away, and the ruffian, with the speed of lightning, after rushing through the open door of the garden, was soon lost in the darkness of night.

To the whole of this scene James Burton had not been a witness ; for, one moment attracted by his curiosity, and another repelled by his fears, he had slunk through the open gate the very moment before the robber made his escape. But no sooner had the mysterious and terrific figure, which was evidently enveloped in an assumed disguise, swept past him like a dark spirit, and vanished







*The Stranger was not seen*

from his sight, than the thought took possession of his mind, that now was the time to render to the old miser that friendly service which, it must in justice be acknowledged, James Burton was not the person to have refused even to a poorer man.

Again creeping stealthily through the garden door, he groped his way along the ivied wall to where a feeble light fell directly upon the object of his kindly interest. The old man still remained in the position in which he had fallen, stunned, no doubt, by the violence of the shock. It was, indeed, a time for the exercise of charity towards one who was said to hold but little sympathy or fellow-feeling with his kind. Nor was charity all. Help—real, personal help seemed now to be required; and James Burton stooped down to raise the old grey head that lay with its scattered locks upon the ground. It felt heavy, strangely heavy, in his hands. James had heard of a *stroke* being very much like death. What was it that made the wondering man start back, and let the poor head fall again? What could it be but death itself? There was a gleam of light upon the pallid features, as he looked earnestly into the face; and he saw at once that a seal had been set there, which no human charity or skill could ever break again.

It was, in fact, no more than might have been expected from that heavy and violent fall. The back of the old man's head had come in contact with a stone step which led towards the garden door, and his hand had only relaxed from its greedy hold, because the sentence had gone forth, that it should feel no more the thrilling touch of gold.

With trembling but rapid steps, James Burton now hastened towards the garden gate. He was not a man

to linger in the presence of the dead. Besides which a fear very naturally arose in his mind, of being discovered about the place where such a catastrophe had occurred. His own belief was, that the death of the old man had not been accomplished by any murderous or premeditated effort ; but that violence and robbery had been committed was very clear ; and the sooner, he thought, that he could get himself entirely away from the scene, the better it would be for his safety and his reputation.

Thus it was that he opened again the little crazy door, believing that he should be able to effect his journey home without any human being becoming acquainted with the cause of his delay ; and he had but just laid his hand upon the latch, when, to his inexpressible horror, he was seized hold of by a powerful arm, and commanded, by a voice by no means conciliating in its tone, to go along with a party of men, who seemed to have been lying in wait for the purpose of securing him.

## CHAPTER XIX.



AFTER the first shock of any great calamity, there is often a transient cessation, or lull, which cheats the credulous heart into a fond belief that "things," as some are apt to say on such occasions, "are not so bad." Betsy Burton, the busy creature, by whom, in relation to the family she had so faithfully served, these words were so often uttered, had her own reasons for believing what she said. Perhaps, beyond all others in that ill-fated household, she had for years been watchful and apprehensive of some impending calamity. Under this apprehension her own little property had been kept secure, and many prudent plans had been formed, resources husbanded, and trifles gathered together for the comfort of the sufferers, which, had she been wholly taken by surprise, it would never have been their privilege to enjoy. It is true these little contributions to personal enjoyment consisted of the most insignificant items in comparison with the overwhelming wretchedness and desolation of their affairs; but as shipwrecked persons wandering on the shore, pick up with eagerness the smallest fragment of their ruined property, so Betsy counted every little trifle which she had preserved for



comfort or convenience, as just so much clear gain ; and hence arose a spring of wholesome joy, not altogether without its effect in diffusing something near akin to cheerfulness around her.

This satisfaction, however, it must be granted, was such as could only extend to a certain range or class of feelings, less important to those whom Betsy served, than to herself. It was simply comfort derived from the fact that there was furniture for use, and food, and a good roof to shelter those poor friendless heads, and money for all present purposes ; none of all which indispensables to comfort the sufferers themselves could ever have secured. Arnold Lee might possibly have done something, had he not been in the very thick, and heat, and fever of the conflict, hoping to the last that " things were not so bad "—that some accommodation might be made ; that certain parties might be satisfied ; that friends might yet be found, and his father's character restored. For many nights he had not laid his head upon a pillow, nor once thought about himself. Dizzy, and half distracted, he had flown from place to place—encountered adverse parties—endured abuse and scorn—had even humbled himself to reason, argue, plead, and almost beg ; until the whole truth had burst upon him ; and when he found that his father had added a criminal violation of his country's laws to his no less criminal violation of laws, which, though less specific, are equally imperative upon the upright man, his courage then failed him, and he shrunk away from public notice, wishing only to hide himself where he could hear no more the sound of his own blighted name. At first, the old familiar thought of emigration had very naturally rushed upon him ; and though penniless himself, he would have felt no fear had he been alone. But his poor mother ! No, he could

not leave her. He was young and strong, and healthy—bread was surely to be had for working—*honest* bread, and that was something.

With these feelings Arnold had returned home, on the eventful evening which preceded the day of their public exposure and shame; and intent upon rescuing his mother from the approaching storm, had planned with Betsy for her speedy removal to some place of privacy and shelter, where she would be alike unsought by upbraiding enemies and curious friends. Thus, then, it had been arranged that, early in the morning, Mrs. Lee should leave the house without the knowledge of anybody but Betsy, as to the place of her final destination. Arnold himself had spent the night in travelling in the service of his friend, Arthur Hamilton, now, like themselves, reduced to utter destitution. Towards the afternoon he had returned, and hearing tidings of his sister Lucy having been seen, had entered for the last time his father's house, there to learn that she had left it, no one knowing whither she was gone. But, finding at the same time that Betsy had been there, and that she also was in pursuit of his sister, he trusted to her well-known powers of investigation where any doubt or difficulty existed, and resolving first to see his mother before he entered upon the task himself, he turned his steps towards the humble dwelling which has already been described.

“What could have brought her here, at such a crisis?” said Arnold to himself as he walked along—“Now, at the very moment when her stay at Hatherstone was of the utmost importance! Perhaps it was her girlish fondness for her mother. But this will never do. She must be taken back again, as soon as possible.”

With this conviction growing on his mind, Arnold

determined to be the escort of his sister Lucy himself—the bearer of the evil tidings to the old man, if not already told; and even if they were, it was no less his duty to go and lay before his grandfather the whole truth. Better to hear it from his lips than from the exaggerated accounts of strangers. Exaggerated!—that could scarcely be, let the messenger be friend or foe. His own account—the simple truth itself, would scarcely be less shocking to a feeling, upright mind, than the worst which the world's malice could invent.

As Arnold walked along, pondering these thoughts, and more and more decided in the opinion, that, as a frank and honourable man, it was his duty to communicate in person with his grandfather, painful as such an interview might be, he was startled by a hand laid quickly, yet with a friendly pressure, upon his shoulder; and looking round, he recognised one of the old servants from the Hall, who seemed in breathless haste, and great bewilderment and anxiety.

“How lucky!” exclaimed the servant, “that I knew it to be you; for you can tell me, I dare say, where Doctor Munroe lives.”

“Munroe — Munroe?” said Arnold. “I used to know.”

“Make haste,” said the man. “Our master's had a stroke.”

“A stroke?” exclaimed Arnold.

“Yes,” replied the man. “There was something happened last night that disturbed him greatly. He was up early this morning, calling everybody to account, and turning the house upside down; and then, they tell me, bad news came, but what it was I never stopped to ask, for it's the doctor I am wanting, so please to tell me if you



can, sir, where St. James's Street is, for I am lost in this new part—lost entirely.”

Struck dumb by this intelligence, Arnold hesitated not a moment, but turning hastily round with the man, accompanied him by the nearest way he was acquainted with to the street in question. Having discharged this painful duty, he then retraced his steps, for a while forgetting his own troubles in this new and great calamity ; yet inwardly resolving, that under present circumstances, and while his mother's heart was so full of sorrow, not to communicate the sad intelligence until the real nature and probable consequences of his grandfather's malady should be more fully ascertained. There might come a time too, he reflected as he walked along, when, so far from being injurious, it might be really beneficial to his mother to have her thoughts compelled into a different channel, and thus withdrawn in some measure from subjects of far more painful interest than the illness or death of the nearest and dearest relative, where such an event is attended with the hope of the righteous, and the prospect of re-union in a better world. Ah ! how different is such a calamity—how fraught with happiness, and hope, when compared with the unrepented sins of the erring and the wayward, if still beloved.

And even if not in the highest sense of the word beloved—if guilt has so marred the image of the Creator, as to obliterate from the creature every trace of its high origin, and to destroy every outward evidence of its immortal capabilities—if the heart, however fondly affected, has ceased to recognise the object of its early attachment in the thing it fears, and, but for its yearning tenderness, it fain would shun, there is still something in having shared the same lot in life together ; in having, hand in



hand, commenced the same uncertain pilgrimage ; in having once been something to each other ; outwardly at least united, and therefore bound before the eye of God and man, by links which death alone is strong enough to sever : there is something, too—how much, the tried and experienced heart alone can tell—in the solemn question which all must answer, how far has my portion of the compact been fulfilled ? in what duty, specified or only understood, promised or only hoped for and trusted in, have I fallen short ; or wherein has the secret influence of my life and character belied its outward profession, and thus driven back or quenched the better purposes of His ? In comparison with facts, and thoughts, and questions such as these, the death of the righteous becomes an event of hopeful promise and deep satisfaction ; a blessing—a holy joy.

Arnold Lee had been so long accustomed to feel for his mother more than for himself. he had been so early introduced into deep sympathy with cares and anxieties beyond the usual experience of his years, that he had learned to understand much of what was passing in maturer minds ; and he thus saw clearly, that as no earthly consolation could be offered to alleviate his mother's sufferings, the great object of those with whom she was associated must be to find other subjects of absorbing interest to occupy her thoughts. The idea then occurred to him, that perhaps the presence of his sister Lucy might assist in this object ; but he little knew the extent to which the poor girl was now thrown upon a mother's tenderness and care, for all that the world held valuable or dear—for all that she had left to lean upon or love.

By the habits of his early life, Arnold was now prepared, beyond what young men of his age usually are, for filling

the responsible, anxious, yet delicate part of protector and comforter to his fallen family. Nor was this all. He saw plainly that he must be their supporter too ; for though the kindness and generosity of a faithful servant had abundantly supplied them with present comforts, it was impossible for any mind equally generous to remain satisfied for a single day, while resting inactive on such a foundation. It was impossible, too, for a mind endowed with common prudence and forethought, not to look forward into that abyss of want and destitution which already seemed to yawn beneath their feet. It is true Arnold possessed many important requisites for making his way, had the world into which he looked appalled been an honest and fair-judging world. He had talent of no mean order—good working powers, with a resolution never daunted in a worthy cause ; he had health and strength, and energy that never flagged, so long as there was duty to be done. What could the world want more ? Alas ! it wanted some things which Arnold could not boast—a little more assumption—a little more finesse—a little more daring to wear a better coat when he had no means of paying for it, and to place his mother and his sister in a more genteel residence, without providing against such vulgar exigencies as rent and taxes. Altogether the world required of Arnold Lee that he should put a better face upon the matter ; that he should go to a distant part of the country, where the blight upon his name was not known ; that he should there acknowledge no poor relations, but provide only for himself ; that he should assume the character of a gentleman in easy circumstances, and thus ensure the patronage of the world, and, finally, his own success.

Instead of all which, the world and its friendship were the very last things Arnold thought of at this particular

crisis of his affairs. To obtain honest bread, and of that sufficient for a family of four, for he always included Betsy as an indispensable addition to their household, was the first and last concern which occupied his mind, after seeing his mother safely sheltered in her new abode, and hearing the recital from Betsy's fluent lips, of all that had transpired during his absence.

All, however, it was impossible that even her eloquent language should describe, for there was one dark history still unrevealed, locked, with other secrets, deep in poor Lucy's aching heart. And thus it was that, to the surprise of all, she sat so still, and listened with such languid interest to all that was related, and often withdrew from their presence. At first they thought the shock had been too much for her, and then they thought she wanted sympathy ; and Betsy at last began to try to rouse her from those deep, deep reveries into which she was perpetually sinking, as if, poor girl, her very senses were gone. Perhaps the good woman was a little hasty, or wanted patience in a case like this ; but certainly it was most pitiful to see the gentle girl under the infliction of this quick rousing—how she looked up bewildered, and said yes, or no, or anything, and held out her delicate white hands as if she was so ready to work, or struggle, or do everything required of her, only she did not understand what ; nor knew which way to look or turn ; nor what there was before her. Ah ! her whole future had been torn away, and yet she must go on—her light had been extinguished, and yet she must find a path—her rock had been swallowed up by the deep waters, and yet she must remain to float upon the surging waves !

When Arnold observed the effect which Betsy's treatment produced upon his sister, tears, for the first time since



their family affliction, hot burning tears, rushed into his eyes. "Leave her alone," said he, "dear Betsy; we must deal gently with her now."

"Now?" said Lucy, and a deep blush spread over her face, as her eyes looked searchingly into her brother's. But he betrayed no sign of having understood her secret, and she grew calm again. Only that she twined her arms around his neck, and whispered in his ear a thousand eloquent thanks for his kindness in begging that she might be left alone.

"Only a little while, Arnold," she said—"a very little while—bear with me, dearest. I will not be so troublesome to you long. Indeed I will not."

It was impossible to resist such an appeal; and Arnold, feeling more than ever the importance of his own exertions, went forth with a stouter heart to seek his fortunes.

The first application made by Arnold for employment proved altogether fruitless; and he returned from a long walk somewhat dispirited, in consequence of having made the discovery, that his father's character was looked upon as an effectual barrier against any trust which might otherwise have been reposed in the son. Still, there might be parties who would listen to him; although help in the quarter to which he had most trusted had failed, there might be parties so in want of a strong arm and able hand, as scarcely to regard his name; and when he looked upon his mother and sister, his courage again rose, and he went out a second time, determined not to consider himself defeated within the space of an entire week at least. Could he have known what months, instead of weeks, are sometimes spent in the same fruitless search, he would have counted little of the resolution that was to last him only seven days.



The second day of Arnold's application to different parties was not more successful than the first. This time, however, the personal contact was less painful to his feelings, for he had merely to be dismissed amongst other intruders, as an impertinent and troublesome fellow, not wanted there ; and although his colour rose, and his pulse beat more quickly, at the tones of harshness and contempt so unusual to his ear, yet feeling himself to be altogether unknown, the insult was less difficult to bear.

But it soon became evident to Arnold, in this fruitless pursuit, that one requisite was wanting, without which it was scarcely reasonable to expect a favourable hearing. He had neither introduction nor recommendation to offer, if asked for ; and to whom could he look for either ? The thought of his cousin, Frederick Ashley, first suggested itself. He was now a prosperous man, and standing well in public esteem. But Arnold bit his lip, and swallowed down his pride, and at last concluded that he would wait another week at least before asking such an act of kindness of him. Had he known all the circumstances which connected that name with his own family, he would indeed have waited, begged, starved, and almost stolen, rather than he would have had recourse to such an alternative.

"Perhaps, after all," thought Arnold, one day, as he paced the busy streets with weary steps, defeated in every attempt, and more and more dispirited every day—"perhaps, after all, I am not in the right line. There are surely occupations in which a man is less trusted than as a merchant's clerk, and for which I am in reality more fitted too." And suddenly arrested in his hopeless and unprofitable career, he stood still, with his hand pressed closely to his brow, thinking so earnestly, as to be entirely regardless of those who were passing by.

It happened that immediately opposite where Arnold stood was a print-shop, with lithographic drawings, and all sorts of ornamental work in the way of painting, modelling, and embellishment of various kinds. Somebody, he thought, must be employed to do these ; and conscious of his talent as a draftsman, he determined upon the rash experiment of offering his services to the master of the establishment.

This was certainly a very juvenile idea ; but despair such as Arnold felt to be already at his heels rendered him not particularly nice as to what experiments he made ; and first looking up, to read the name above the door, he entered with a firm and manly step, and asked if Mr. Mowbray was at home. A very civil shopman assured him that he was, and in a few moments would be at liberty ; in the meantime offering, by way of temptation, several elegant and costly articles for his inspection.

Arnold thought them very beautiful, no doubt ; and took them up, and turned them this way and that, not knowing what he did ; for he was growing very sick at heart, and well he might, having spent the dinner-hour for many successive days in pacing up and down the streets ; and thus he was looking with a faint and dizzy gaze at gilded peacocks with their purple wings, and lakes of pearl, and alabaster nymphs, when, suddenly emerging from a snug recess behind the shop, appeared the master himself, bowing with great respect, as he attended to the door a gentleman whom Arnold instantly recognised as having seen before, though where and when he strove in vain to recollect.

“ If you should meet with such a person,” said the gentleman who was leaving the shop, “ you will be kind enough to let me know.”

“ Certainly,” replied Mr. Mowbray. “ I shall have great pleasure in doing so, and have no doubt but I shall

see one in a few days. Young men of that kind are only too numerous. There is no getting rid of them when they do come." And he smiled, and rubbed his hands, as if he were washing off the whole human race. Arnold saw plainly there was nothing to be hoped from him.

"Pray, may I ask," said Arnold to the shopman, "the name of the gentleman who has just gone out? I think I ought to know something of him."

"Mr. Dalrymple," replied the man.

Arnold said no more, but darted after him. A bright thought had flashed through his mind, upon which in another moment he was so intent, that he could scarcely find patience to track the footsteps of the person in question, but would fain have stopped him in the street, and told him all his wants, his wishes, and his capabilities. Prudence, however, gained the mastery over this sudden impulse; and while he followed at a respectful distance, he had the mortification of seeing Mr. Dalrymple enter a coach-office, and afterwards take his place upon a rapid vehicle, to be whirled, for what he knew, to the very ends of the earth.

This day, however, Arnold returned to his mother and sister with more animation in his look and manner, derived from the stimulus of having at last, as he believed, hit upon a likely idea. Yet still fearing to disappoint his mother, he kept his purpose to himself; and, indeed, the state of their family at the time of his return was such as to render any mention of his own proceedings as useless as it would have been inappropriate.

The first object which met his observation on entering the house was Betsy Burton, apparently in a state of absolute frenzy, though whether it was grief or passion by which she was possessed it would have been difficult to



determine. Most probably it was both ; for Betsy's indignation against all injustice was habitually as great as her compassion for suffering and distress.

" Only think ! " she exclaimed, as soon as Arnold's step was heard upon the stairs. " My brother James imprisoned for a murder ! and he a poor soul that never had the heart to kill a mouse ! Only think, Master Arnold, what laws we have—what a government—what a king and constitution, to let such rank injustice, and abuse, and abomination, as this go on. Why they're worse than any heathens, to seize a poor innocent like that, and call him a murderer. But *I'll* let them hear of it—*I'll* tell them to their faces when I come into the witness-box—judges and all—they shall hear a truth or two for once in their lives, if they never heard one before."

Perhaps it was well for Betsy Burton that the extreme excitement, and no less extreme agony, of hearing the sad tidings of her brother's arrest and confinement, on suspicion of so terrible an act, could work itself away in this manner ; more especially as, under these circumstances, it seemed as if nothing could be done ; and *doing* was no less Betsy's forte than speaking. The fact of the obscurity of her present situation having prevented her hearing of her brother's melancholy situation until many days after the frightful event had occurred, seemed now to add great poignancy to the sister's feelings ; for she could not be convinced but that her own personal application and testimony in his favour would have prevented any hastily-conceived suspicion resting upon him. But now she was told he must endure a public trial in a court of law ; and a trial for murder, with the stigma attaching to it, was in Betsy's opinion but a very few degrees better than an actual murder itself. The good name of the family, she said,



would be gone for ever ; and for her part, if anything could ever drive her so mad as to think of marrying, it would be *that*, simply because it would afford her an opportunity of getting rid of a disgraceful name.

The first thing which had roused the mother and the daughter from their all-absorbing sorrow, was this passionate grief of their faithful servant ; and no sooner did Mrs. Lee find herself called upon to assist, as well as to sympathise with her, than a spring of energy arose within her, which she had begun to think was dead for ever.

It was indeed a case both for sympathy and help, for no one who knew James Burton could believe for a moment that he was capable of such a crime ; yet such were the condemning facts under which he had been committed, that it already began to appear extremely difficult to establish sufficient proof of his innocence.

Had energy, and strength of purpose, and activity of will, been all that was wanted to rescue the helpless man from his threatened doom, the sister of James Burton would have proved herself, of all human beings, the most efficient as a friend ; but unfortunately, Betsy was not quite so learned in the laws of her country, as she was eloquent in their abuse ; nor so capable of reasoning upon circumstantial evidence, as upon the stronger evidence of her own preconceived opinion of her brother's character ; and both these requisites happened to be necessary before any correct judgment could be formed of his pitiable fate. It was very important, therefore, to have near her such a friend as Mrs. Lee, who could advise and direct in so critical a case, and whose clearer views assisted materially in enabling her servant to look more dispassionately upon the whole affair.

Nothing, however, which Mrs. Lee was able to suggest

could satisfy Betsy that it would be wisest to allow the law to take its own course; and that, if her brother was innocent, he would, without the least shadow of a doubt, be fully and honourably acquitted. Betsy had more faith in her own instrumentality than in a whole army of lawyers; and thus she prepared herself for action, by taking down a long list of the names of influential individuals, both male and female, to whom she determined to apply, and whose feelings she doubted not would be easily wrought upon in a case of such flagrant cruelty and injustice.

While Betsy Burton was thus pursuing her own eccentric course, Arnold Lee was equally intent upon carrying out his own secret purpose; and with this object in view, he lost no time on the following morning, in calling at the office of Mr. Dalrymple, where he had the unexpected good fortune to find that gentleman at home, and so far disengaged, that he was ushered into his presence without many moments' delay.

Mr. Dalrymple had scarcely even yet begun to act the man of consequence amongst his *inferiors*. He had so very recently been, to all worldly purposes, an inferior himself, and he was still so conscious of wanting that substantial background of wealth or property, which gives firmness and dignity to the outward bearing, as well as satisfaction to the inner man, that, except when in the presence of those with whom he had an end to serve by looking other than he was, Mr. Dalrymple had nothing forbidding in his air or manner, and Arnold addressed him with more ease and confidence than he had anticipated.

There might be other reasons besides his own unsubstantial footing in society, why Mr. Dalrymple appeared less assuming on the present occasion than in the presence of Sir James Crawford and his friends; for if it was then

important to him to be a man of influence and plentiful resources, it was almost as important to transact business with those whom he had to *pay*, in his real character of a hard pinched and struggling man. Thus then, he no sooner became acquainted with Arnold's affliction, than he was almost as poor as Arnold himself; but still he confessed to the fact, that he had been inquiring for a clever draftsman, and was at that very moment ready to put immediate employment into the hands of such a person, if he could be found. He then, of course, expatiated upon the advantages attendant upon a situation in his office, upon how much might there be learned, and, in fact, upon so many items of real gain, that Arnold began to fear the employment would be offered to him with no other remuneration than its attendant privileges.

During the course of this interview, Mr. Dalrymple, who was no mean judge of general capability, became so favourably impressed with regard to the working talents of his young companion, that he determined to extend his generosity a little beyond its usual limits, rather than allow so efficient an assistant to pass away into the service of other employers. Besides which, the few simple manly words in which Arnold told the sad history of his present situation, as the ground of his urgency in making the application, revealed a secret to Mr. Dalrymple, which he had not unfrequently found extremely favourable to his purposes. Indeed he was remarkable, since his recent elevation to the rank of a man of business himself, for finding employment for the poor and the destitute, as well as for men of questionable character; for while he took them on trial with an air of compassion and good will, by no means ungraceful in itself, he was thus enabled to secure two important advantages—that of engaging them at the



lowest possible salary, and that of being able to turn them off at a moment's notice.

As one of this questionable class, Arnold now found that he must obtain employment, or not obtain it at all ; and when he pleaded the necessities of a mother and sister to maintain, as a ground for requiring higher remuneration than was offered, he had to bear to be reminded that, after the very recent affairs which were so generally known in connection with his family, there was perhaps not another gentleman in the whole town of M—— who would hold any communication with him at all.

Arnold felt all the bitter truth of what was said, and he felt also the nature of such advantage taken of his present position ; but he knew that Mr. Dalrymple was not singular in this ; that it was but the necessary consequence of his father's crimes ; and that he must bring down his spirit patiently, and outlive, if he could not immediately overcome, the fearful disadvantages under which he had now to compete with other honest and honourable men, even for the lawful possession of a moderate allowance of daily bread.

Finally, then, it was arranged between the two parties, that Arnold should take his daily place in Mr. Dalrymple's office. The nature of his employment there, and the extent to which he was afterwards to become useful to the plans and purposes of that rising character, remain yet to be described.



## CHAPTER XX.



HERE was not one of all the guests who left the party at Sir James Crawford's, where Dorothy Dalrymple had figured for the first time in her life in such society, who returned home so agreeably excited as herself. That she had passed successfully through an ordeal which had previously been so much dreaded, was, indeed, a fact of no trifling importance ; and forgetful of all her lately assumed dignity, she rushed into the shelter of the old parlour again, almost wild with delight, detaining her astonished aunt until near the dawn of morning light, by the animated history of all she had seen and heard, not forgetting, at the suggestion of that curious maiden, to describe how every one was dressed.

"But you should have been there yourself, aunt Anne, and seen us all," said Dorothy, rather imprudently. At which the spinster tossed her head, remarking that she knew she *ought* to have been there, that it was a great oversight, and so on, until again interrupted by Dorothy's eloquent description of the part she herself had acted throughout the evening. One thing, however, Dorothy

did not tell—the history of her lameness ; and when her aunt, who had, immediately after her departure, recollected the probability of dancing, asked eagerly how that difficulty had been overcome, Dorothy put her off with a grave and indefinite reply, that it was very easily managed ; and then she passed on to other themes, though scarcely in so lively a manner as before.

After a night of such unwonted excitement, it was but natural that Dorothy, if she slept at all, should extend her slumbers far into the following day ; while Bridget, who longed eagerly for her own share of the history of the past evening, softened her heavy step as she passed by the door of her young mistress, and restrained her burning curiosity, out of consideration for her necessary repose.

How long Dorothy might have slept, it is impossible to say, had she not been suddenly awakened about the hour of noon by a thundering knock at the front door, which, conveying some indistinct association with the parties and scenes of the previous evening, seemed to touch and thrill some peculiarly sensitive chord ; and catching soon afterwards the loud and querulous tones of Bridget's voice, she applied her ear to the door that opened out upon the stairs, alarmed lest that well-meaning but imprudent creature should by some inadvertency let down the newly-acquired dignity of the house.

Half stupified by her late slumbers, Dorothy did not all at once perceive the drift of the conversation, which was now carried on at the door between Bridget and a man-servant, who was evidently engaged in conveying kind and complimentary inquiries about what Bridget could not, or would not, understand ; and when Dorothy heard the old servant distinctly exclaim—"She never was lame in her whole life, to my knowledge ; and as to a sprained

anle—why, she skipped along the passage last night as light as a young lamb. Bless the heart of her, and the foot too—there's no more the matter with her anle than there is with mine."

"Bridget, Bridget," exclaimed Dorothy, in the loudest whisper that ever was uttered; and, stretching her neck through the door.—"You stupid old creature," she continued, hurrying back to feel in her despair for a bell, where no bell had ever been; and then, half frantic with her dilemma, she vented her feelings in such a thundering knock upon the floor, that the terrified servant rushed immediately upstairs.

"Go down again, you foolish woman," exclaimed Dorothy. "Give my compliments and thanks, and say that I am better; and don't stand gossiping there."

"But the man's gone," said Bridget, very quietly, and considerably subdued by the imperious look and manner of her mistress.

"I wish you would go too, to the ends of the earth," said Dorothy, almost, for the first time in her life, really angry with the faithful creature. But the sight of the blue apron raised to those eyes which had looked so fondly on her childhood, when there were no others to do so, subdued her harsher feelings; and she softened her previous reproof by a grave lecture upon the danger of holding any lengthened conversations with strange servants at the door.

"I should never have thought of speaking to him," remonstrated Bridget—"not I, indeed: I'm not one of that kind. I never listen to any of their nonsense. And when they tell me I'm handsome, I don't believe them."

"You are quite right, Bridget," interrupted Dorothy, with a tone of great gravity, though turning away to conceal her laughter.

"But touching you," continued the poor woman.

"That is the very subject you ought most of all to avoid," said Dorothy, "I know you mean well towards me."

"Don't I?" sobbed Bridget.

"Yes, you are a faithful creature," continued Dorothy; "but you must attend to what I say. You know, Bridget, as well as I do, that hitherto we have been very poor, and very quiet."

"Poor as church mice," sighed Bridget.

"And the manners and conversation which did very well for you and me, Bridget, a year ago, won't do for either of us now."

"Then am I to let these men come here, and ask about your ancles, whenever they like?"

"Bridget, I want my breakfast," said Dorothy, again assuming her imperative tone; and the astonished woman dared not disobey.

"I am beginning to think," said Dorothy to her aunt, on descending to the little parlour, "that we must really have another servant."

"I have been of that opinion for some time," replied her aunt. "It is quite impossible to mix in anything like society, so long as we are attended upon by such a creature as Bridget."

"I should like two servants, instead of one," observed Dorothy.

"Certainly," responded the aunt.

"But how shall we bring my father to the same way of thinking?" asked Dorothy, very naturally.

"It seems to me," replied the aunt, rather scornfully, "that you have nothing to do but give yourself a few airs, toss your head, and look determined, and he will refuse



you nothing that you ask. I am sure I never saw anything like it, when you asked him for money. I only wish I had begun with him in the same way myself."

Dorothy was a little graver than usual this morning, or she would undoubtedly have played upon this regret of her aunt's, to her own amusement, if not equally to the satisfaction of that unjesting personage. But somehow or other, she was not just now on the best possible terms with herself. The exultation of the previous night seemed all to have died away. She had talked of success, but in what had she succeeded? She had talked of maintaining her self-respect, but she had fallen in her own esteem lower than ever in her life before.

There is something unusually depressing in a late coming down after a late evening of excitement, and to this might be attributed much of the gloom which sat upon a brow not much accustomed to be overshadowed by clouds. But Dorothy was not long before she regained her wonted spirits, and even sought her old friend Bridget, who had been so sharply rebuked in the morning, with a secret desire to restore their intercourse to its former cordiality; a purpose which it was highly important to accomplish before any steps could be taken towards the introduction of another assistant into that department of the household.

It was some time, however, before Bridget deigned to be conciliated by the advances of her mistress. *She* could be affronted as well as other folks; and had as good a right to be, she said. She dared say somebody else had been affronted too, and ill-treated at that grand party, or she never would have turned upon an old friend as she had done that morning.

"Indeed you are mistaken there, Bridget, if you think

"I was ill-treated," said Dorothy. "I assure you, even your best wishes would have been gratified, had you seen how I was received."

A sudden light came over the plain features of the old servant, as she listened to this agreeable intelligence; and expressing distinctly by her speaking looks, how much she desired to hear more of what had transpired, Dorothy indulged her with one of her most eloquent descriptions, not a little coloured for the occasion, by those glowing embellishments with which she was so admirably skilled in painting. Pleased with her own story, and animated by the recollections of that enlivening scene, Dorothy lost for the moment all trace of the humiliation which on first awaking in the morning had lain heavy on her heart; and with a levity which often drove away her better feelings, she even turned into jest the ingenious method by which she had escaped the embarrassment of being led out to dance.

To all this old Bridget listened with delighted attention, wholly absorbed in the splendour and novelty of the scenes which Dorothy described; and more than ever convinced that she was born under a lucky star, and would be somebody yet—"perhaps a queen, there was no telling." But when the story reached its climax, and the trick of the sprained ancle was disclosed, Bridget could withhold her tribute of applause no longer.

"Well done, my brave girl!" she exclaimed. "That was capital. A better scheme than that I never heard."

But while Bridget was uttering these, and many other vehement encomiums upon the cleverness of her young mistress, Dorothy's countenance again assumed its grave and gloomy look; and cutting short the conversation, she went silently up into her own room.

“ Oh, that I had a mother—a friend!” exclaimed the solitary girl, as soon as she found herself alone—“ some one who could understand me. The vulgar pride of this poor ignorant creature—pride in what my heart despises, has taught me an humbling lesson. Shall I strive to forget it, or shall I lay it like a blister to my soul, and trust to the healing which its pain inflicts.”

It was true enough that no gentler or more delicate method of placing the truth before her would have made it so odious as it now appeared. Friends of a higher grade, had they been let into her secret, would in all probability have soothed her with their soft pretences that the thing was only an amusing trifle, not worth a painful thought; friends of a lighter cast would have laughed with her at the absurdity of the dilemma to which she had been reduced, and the lucky chance by which she had escaped; friends of a more serious class might have been satisfied to pity *poor human nature* for its many weaknesses, and so to leave her, thinking herself no worse than others, and not so bad as most; but a friend of old Bridget's cast of character and habits, bursting forth in actual triumph, with low, coarse exclamations of rude joy, revealed at once the humbling fact that Dorothy had really placed herself upon a level with such characters, had measured her conduct by their standard; and in doing what they thought clever, had actually done wrong, without their ignorance for her excuse.

True, it might seem but a trifle to be the cause of so much bitter thought, yet it was one of those trifles which sometimes form the turning point in a person's life—a trifle, to any one but the individual concerned—to them how important! Well might Dorothy wish, at this crisis of her fate, for a mother, or a friend, for some one to solve the



difficult question, whether she should draw back, or advance upon a false foundation. As in most cases of a similar nature, circumstances decided the question for her.

For the present, and while none of these circumstances pressed either one way or the other, she remained comparatively safe, fully believing herself to be under the influence of a better and nobler resolution, which would effectually prevent her committing the same kind of folly again.

In one respect Dorothy was perfectly correct in her conclusions. She was seriously determined to commence some system of self-improvement which might enable her to fill an honourable position in society, instead of merely acting a part; and had she counted the cost of such an undertaking, had she even understood the nature and amount of application that would be absolutely necessary for carrying it out, nothing could have been more praiseworthy, or more advantageous to her. Unfortunately, however, Dorothy's views were vague, capricious, and ungoverned by any other law than her own inclination. Her imagination had been fired by the most ambitious ideas of what it would be possible for her to attain and to do, simply from her quick observation of what she had seen during the evening spent at Sir James Crawford's.

No single feature of elegance or embellishment in those richly ornamented rooms had been lost upon her. The pictures, the engravings she had seen there, still glowed in her memory; and the images of grace and beauty which they displayed haunted her very dreams.

"I can learn to draw, at least," she said often to herself, "and then in time I shall be able to paint my own pictures, if I cannot buy them."

Possessed with this idea, Dorothy began to rise early,



and keeping the secret from her own family, especially keeping it so as not to be crushed by the cold finger of her aunt, she applied herself with all diligence to the use of her pencil, and with such unexpected success, that before many days had elapsed, she conceived the extraordinary design of submitting her productions to her father's critical eye, and actually soliciting his aid towards the more systematic pursuit of this delightful art.

Perhaps no human being was ever much happier, in an humble way, than Dorothy Dalrymple while thus employed ; for happy indeed is that stage of progress in any creative art in which we have not yet begun to see and feel the faults of our own work. Very beautiful, then, at this time, was the foliage of Dorothy's trees ; very feathery and dark ; while they all composed one mass, of which it could not certainly be said that one stood nearer than another, or that the light fell upon the topmost boughs more than upon those which grew below. Ah ! they were wonderfully pleasant woods, and hills, and lakes, and streams, amongst which the young enthusiast expatiated then. No matter what other eyes could discern amongst them, her own were bright enough to penetrate the imaginary perspective, and to see far, far away into the distance, bright images and forms, and realms of light and air, which no graphic art was ever destined to bring near.

Very different, indeed, were these performances of Dorothy's, left as she now was to her own course, and excited by a fresh impulse, from those which she had first attempted to execute, under the cold eye of her instructress ; and although it must be owned that they had visible defects of no trifling description, yet they exhibited, at the same time, a power and truth of delineation which

afforded hopeful indication of future success. Of all this the young artist herself was fully sensible ; and so far did they surpass her preconceived ideas of what it would be possible for her to accomplish in so short a time, that she decided at once upon the bold project of spreading them before her father, taking only one precaution, that of choosing the time for doing so when her aunt should be absent ; for there was something in the perpetual damp of her dull sarcasm which she felt would effectually wipe away every line of beauty from her performance.

Ever since the party at Sir James Crawford's, Mr. Dalrymple and his daughter had stood upon a more agreeable and familiar footing with regard to each other. Although few words were exchanged between them, almost as few as before, there seemed to be a tacit understanding, in which both participated, in reality the natural result of both having shared at the same moment in one strong feeling, and that not a mere passing emotion, but one of the most powerful tendencies of character by which human nature can be habitually governed. There was, then, one link of intelligence established betwixt them. It needed no explanation, no language, to indicate its nature ; but, like some electric cord, it silently and unseen conveyed to each the same impression, whenever it was touched.

If the early mornings in which Dorothy employed herself with her pencil, alone, were the happiest of her life, the moment when her father's eye glanced over her drawings was unquestionably the proudest. Whether it was from Mr. Dalrymple speaking so seldom, that unusual importance attached to what he said, or whether he really spoke more to the purpose than others, most certainly his praise had double the weight of praise in

general; and when he glanced with his sharp, searching look from the drawings to his daughter's face, and back again to the drawings, Dorothy felt almost as if the destiny of her life was hanging upon the words which he might speak.

"You don't mean to say that *you* have done these?" was Mr. Dalrymple's first observation; and, in the tone in which he spoke, it was sufficient.

"I do," replied Dorothy, almost breathless.

"This wants perspective," her father went on to say; "and this wants light, and the line here is out of the perpendicular. You have had bad subjects to copy. You must have better than these. And perspective—you must study perspective."

"I don't know anything about it," said Dorothy. "I never heard it explained. I only see that things go small in the distance, but I don't know how, or why."

"Nonsense, you *must* know how," said her father, for he had as little patience with his daughter's ignorance, as if he had spent thousands in providing her with the best means of instruction. "There are books," he continued. "Or, let me see—let me see;" and he bit his lip hopefully, and the girl sat watching his face with her large black, speaking eyes, as if life and death were hanging upon the sentence he was about to utter.

It was not in Dorothy's nature, however, to wait long for anything; and as her father was still silent, she ventured at last to say, very meekly—"Perhaps I might have lessons."

"I was thinking of that very thing," observed Mr. Dalrymple. "There is a youth lately come into the office—one of the cleverest fellows I have ever had the luck to meet with; poor—dreadfully poor. Indeed, he was per-



fectly destitute when I consented to employ him ; but he handles his pencil like a master ; and as for correctness of outline, and perspective, and all that, I have seldom seen his equal."

"Is he very young?" asked Dorothy, with a slight commencement of a smile about her mouth.

"Older than you are, a good deal," was the sharp reply ; "and grave enough to be your grandfather. So don't anticipate any nonsense."

Dorothy's face became instantly as serious as her father could desire.

"Let me see," he continued. "There is not much doing in the office just now of that kind of work. I dare say he might come in for half an hour or so sometimes, and just put you in the way of drawing in perspective, if you would promise me not to waste his time."

"Come in here?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes, here," replied her father. "Why not?"

"Because," said Dorothy, "aunt Anne would insist upon it that he came to teach her, and not me."

"You may leave that point for me to settle," observed Mr. Dalrymple ; and looking at his watch, he started up to leave the room.

No sooner was he gone, than Dorothy clapped her hands with delighted animation, at having gained so great a point with her father. Who the poor destitute youth destined to be her instructor might prove to be, she neither knew nor cared. One step she believed to be already taken on the high road to distinction. Not the distinction which belonged to the mere flutter and pretence of a brilliant evening, but distinction founded on the surer basis of talent successfully employed. To excel, too, in the very line to which her natural tastes directed. To draw—to



paint—not only for herself, but for others, the actual pictures which her imagination was perpetually employed in forming—to make the very images which lived and glowed within her mind visible and present to the minds of others—to give pleasure—to charm, delight, and fascinate, through the medium of that which was most delightful, and fascinating to herself—to become known to the world as a passionate devotee of the fine arts—and perhaps to travel—to visit Italy, and Greece—as a final residence, to settle at Rome, and to date her letters from the Capitol!—and—

What a pity that aunt Anne should step in just at the moment when Dorothy was writing from the Roman Capitol—very much heated too, and complaining of the dust, and wishing Dorothy would take away her *litter* from the work table, and help her to measure some moreen for new hangings to her bed.

## CHAPTER XXI



THE remainder of the day on which Arnold Lee had made his successful application for employment, if that arrangement could be called successful, which only secured him from the terrors of actual starvation, was spent by him in a long solitary walk through country lanes and fields, selected for the purpose of enabling him to collect his scattered thoughts, and make those cool and correct calculations which it was impossible to carry on in the presence of his family.

Although deeply experienced in affliction, Arnold was still young in years. He had simply been associated with his father as a clerk in his office, without responsibility or trust of any kind; for either that strange jealousy which has already been alluded to, or at best a want of congeniality, had rendered Mr. Lee, if possible, more distant and incommunicable to his son, than to others engaged in his business. Arnold consequently felt it to be no part of his duty to mix himself up with transactions to which he had previously been in a great measure a stranger, and in which his interference could now be of no possible use. Had there been the slightest chance that any effort of his—any

suffering or privation, endured even for a life time, could redeem the past, or restore to every one their own, he would scarcely have shrunk back from absolute torture to himself, so harrowing to his upright and honourable feelings was the conviction of the many wrongs his father had committed, and the immense amount of property which he had been the means of wresting from its rightful owners.

The utter hopelessness of this one bitter thought was to a character like Arnold's almost enough to bear him down to a premature old age. He felt at the present moment as if it was impossible to sustain life under such a load; and sometimes, as he wandered alone, the mad thought came over him, that he would cast himself into the deep river, and so never be heard of again. Then he thought of the Hatherstone property, and wondered whether it would be sufficient to discharge all his father's debts; and then he struck his brow with impatient irritation, to think that his sister Lucy had forfeited the happy chance of her favourable position there; and then he thought of the old man, and his recent illness, with its probable consequences, and thus he grew calm and sorrowful, until at last he actually wept like any child.

This irritability, and excess of emotion, was by no means natural to Arnold. Hitherto he had evinced, under every circumstance where it was required, a remarkable degree of self-possession, and a manly fortitude beyond his years. Now, however, his whole appearance, conduct and character, seemed changed. He had lost the fine healthy colour from his cheek, his pale hand trembled while it supported his throbbing brow, where drops of faint perspiration were perpetually starting, to be driven in again by cold shivering chills. No wonder Arnold's great energy was beginning to fail. He was absolutely hungering.

From the day of his great calamity, he had scarcely eaten or slept. There was a soft inviting bed prepared for him every night by Betsy's faithful hand, and food was spread before him, of which he was as kindly pressed to partake; but he always *had* eaten, or was called away at dinner time, or intended to lunch on his way into the town; for until he should be fortunate enough to earn his own provisions, he felt as if he neither could eat, nor *ought* to eat, the food so much required by those who were more helpless than himself. Ah! it is often a hard and bitter thing to be strictly honest, and upright, and honourable, in this strange world of ours. The simple effort to be so is, however, worth something; but the mercy which permits the trial to last only so long as we have strength to bear it, is infinitely more.

This day, for the first time in his life, Arnold ate the bread of charity; but the dispenser of the bounty did not know it, or possibly she might have been less pressing in her offer. A peasant woman, who was just carrying a pail of new milk into her house, supposing Arnold to be a gentleman a little tired with his walk, and seeing him look casually at the milk as he passed her door, asked him, with great good-nature, if he would like a draught; and knowing the spirit in which it was offered, observing too an appearance of plenty and comfort around the dwelling, he accepted the welcome refreshment, and even a thick slice from a brown loaf which the woman laughingly cut off for him, saying, she had never served such a pleasant-looking beggar in her life before.

Of course Arnold made himself as pleasant as he could, in return for this most seasonable kindness; and after chatting for a few moments about the rearing of calves, and poultry, he walked away, surprised at himself for the



cheerfulness and vigour with which he could now not only retrace his homeward steps, but actually think and plan for the coming day. It was a pleasant, simple way of learning a most useful lesson. That draught of pure and wholesome milk, that slice of homely bread, had taught him that the natural laws which govern matter as well as mind must be regarded ; and that if we would effectually assist our fellow creatures, or serve our Creator, we must strive, by all rational means, to maintain health and harmony of action amongst the different powers of body and mind which he has committed to our trust, and which we can never hope to employ, either for our own happiness or his glory, if we wantonly violate the laws designed by infinite wisdom for the government of the whole universe.

To his own surprise and satisfaction, Arnold Lee was enabled to meet his mother and sister on the evening described with more of cheerfulness in his look and manner than they had seen for many days. He fancied, too, that something of the same nature threw a feeble light over them. Betsy was again absent, still on her brother's business ; and the three sat down together, to a supper of dry bread and water, which they enjoyed the more, that the good creature by whom it was provided was not there to distress herself about the meagreness of the provision, or to insist upon setting out a more plentiful repast.

Mrs. Lee was unquestionably more cheerful. She had been all day busying herself about her servant's affairs, writing letters for her, and devising plans for access to different parties ; and when the poor woman was gone out, assisting with her own hands to put in order their small habitation, so that nothing should seem out of place on Betsy's return, or convey to her mind the painful idea that

she had neglected her mistress to attend to her own or her family's concerns.

Arnold had now the agreeable intelligence to convey, that he had at last found occupation, and of a nature so congenial to his tastes, that while he carefully concealed the amount of remuneration he was to receive, he dwelt with such animation upon the occupation itself, as to convey the idea that he should soon be a happy, if not quite an independent man.

Glad of the present opportunity to speak freely of their circumstances, without the presence of their benefactress, Mrs. Lee and her son entered fully into the necessity of changing their abode, and of the still more painful necessity to which they both saw plainly they were reduced, of giving up the luxury of Betsy Burton's services.

"It is of no use concealing the truth," said Arnold. "The payment I shall receive would not half cover our expenses here." He did not think it necessary to say more, or he might have doubled the sum again, and yet again, without raising it to the amount required by the comforts they were then enjoying."

"Two things are certain," continued Arnold. "We must be honest; and yet we must live."

As he said this, his sister Lucy fixed upon him her soft blue eyes, and for the first time he saw that they had become larger, more full, and altogether greatly changed. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "the necessity of living is not laid upon us all."

"We must be honest, however," he said audibly again; "and therefore we must eat the bread of this excellent and generous creature no longer than is absolutely necessary."

"I have been thinking of opening a little school," said Mrs. Lee.

"I have been thinking of making wax-flowers," said Lucy.

"Wax-flowers!" exclaimed Arnold, and he mused a few minutes in silence. "I really should not be surprised if that plan would answer. I have seen a good deal lately. I have looked in at all the shops, and really there is not one where the wax-flowers are anything like yours. I remember those beautiful camellias you made for my aunt Ashley. What is it, Lucy, dear? Did anything pain you?"

The poor girl had started unconsciously at the sound of this name, as if a serpent had suddenly appeared amongst her flowers; but she returned to the subject with sufficient energy to show that she was really in earnest, and whatever importance her brother might attach to the success of her plan, he hailed the prospect of interesting occupation as a medicine for herself, too eagerly to let the idea pass away without his warmest endeavours to bring it to a practical issue.

"But after all," said Arnold, "I don't think you have either of you the least idea of the kind of dwelling, or the manner, in which we must actually live."

"Only let us live honestly," said his mother, "and I have no care about the rest. Let us have no hiring of rooms which we can never pay for; no comforts enjoyed before we have calculated the cost."

"To-morrow," said Arnold, "I will see what can be done. On the following day I commence my new occupation. Before that takes place, I must see you settled in some more suitable abode. But promise me one thing, dear mother—that you will not weep, when you see what kind of roof must be our shelter now. A single tear from you would destroy in a moment the resolution I have been days and nights in building up."



Mrs. Lee made a faithful promise that she would not be guilty of such weakness, even if it should prove to be a cellar to which she was conducted as her future home, and the conversation then turned upon the best means of making known to Betsy the necessary alteration in their circumstances.

Mrs. Lee undertook to perform this difficult and painful duty, and painful indeed it proved. On the following morning their intention was made known in terms as gentle as it was possible to use, and Mrs. Lee was well disciplined to gentleness; but the burst of anguish which her first communication called forth, rendered it almost impossible for her to proceed; and then the difficulty of making the generous creature reason, of making her even see their situation, as she would but too quickly have seen her own, had she been similarly circumstanced, all combined to render this morning's duty one of the most distressing which Mrs. Lee had ever had to discharge.

At first, as might have been expected, Betsy was extremely indignant, and argued that her money was her own, that she had worked hard enough for it, and had surely a right to use it as she liked. She then went over to another view of the subject, and said the obligation need not touch their pride, if that was what drove them away; for all that she possessed was theirs. Without their money she would not then be the owner of a single penny. So, for what she could see, the thing was as long as it was short, and they might call it maintaining *her*, if they liked that better. It came to the same thing in the end.

It was impossible not to smile at some of Betsy's ingenious arguments, and Mrs. Lee was really amused at the manner in which she could turn them her own way, to suit her own kind and benevolent purposes. But still Mrs.



Lee was firm. She was compelled to be firm by her naturally strong sense of what was right ; and at last assuring Betsy that she did not think it either kind or respectful to stand forcibly in the way of her doing what her conscience told her that she ought to do, the poor woman then burst into a passionate flood of tears, that ceased not to fall during the whole of the preparations, which she assisted her mistress in making.

“ It’s the separation that takes hold of me worse than anything,” she said again and again, in a low murmuring tone, as she went from room to room, insisting upon it that things belonged to the family, which had been hers by purchase and possession for years ; while Mrs. Lee, amongst the confusion and the ruin of her own property, could not, by any process of reasoning or recollection, make her mind clear about the fact ; and thus many of Betsy’s hoarded treasures went over to the afflicted family at last ; and many articles of furniture, of comfort and convenience, were subsequently found in their more lowly dwelling, to the history of which they never could discover the least clue.

It would have been very satisfactory, both to Arnold and his mother, could they have entirely lost sight of this true and persevering friend, on the day of their removal to that poor and, comparatively speaking, miserable abode. They did not, in short, wish any human being who had known them in their former state to look in upon them there ; and least of all the individual who would have been, of all others, most pained by the contemplation of their altered state. Betsy Burton, however, was not a friend to be shaken off at such a time. So long as there remained a spoon to pack, a trunk to cord, or a carriage to be called and paid for, Betsy stood beside them ; and

ne would not but have known the exact address and situation of the place to which they were going for all the world.

As they drew nearer to this place, the heart of poor Arnold began to beat heavily, and he almost wished it sunk at the bottom of the sea.

"I shall never get them in," he sighed to himself, and already the carriage was sticking fast, with one wheel almost buried in deep holes, which received the garbage of the whole neighbourhood.

"It is not here, however," he exclaimed, laughing, as a sudden jolt sent Lucy upon his knee. "No, my poor child," he continued, holding her fondly in his arms, "you shall not breathe an atmosphere like this. I would rather die than compel you to it."

"Ah, now," said Mrs. Lee, "it is growing a little brighter again; and there is positively a green field. Don't you see it, Betsy?"

"A green churchyard, I should think, by the neighbourhood," observed Betsy, in a most dolorous tone.

"Here we are, at last," said Arnold, stopping the driver, and then opening the door of the carriage, and springing out.

Not a word beyond this was spoken by the whole party, only that Betsy busied herself about the luggage and the payment of the men, while Arnold, drawing down the white veil over his sister's face, placed his arm gently and softly around her waist, leading her forward, while his mother followed close behind.

Throughout the whole range of human experience, had it been possible at that moment to probe every heart at once, there could not well have been found a sharper agony than that which thrilled through the breast of Arnold Lee,

when, after throwing open a door which led out of a little narrow passage, he turned round to Mrs. Lee, and said—  
“ Well, mother, this is all.”

Well was it for Arnold that his mother was a woman of strong principle, as well as keen feeling, or his good resolutions might all have been crushed at once by a word, a look, or a single tone of that familiar voice.

Mrs. Lee, however, had too often mastered her own emotions, to be their slave at such a time as this. But beyond this, she was too much accustomed to think of others rather than herself. She was therefore perfectly at home, even under these novel circumstances ; and with a sweet serenity, she walked directly up to the little window, and observed, in an animated tone, “ that it looked towards the west, and was really very pleasantly situated.” “ See, Lucy,” she said, holding out her hand to draw her daughter to her side. “ We shall always be able to watch the sun set here.”

“ It has already gone down in clouds,” observed Lucy.

“ Ah, my beloved child,” said the mother in a soft under tone, as she kissed the beautiful cheek down which tears were plentifully streaming. “ Do you ever think of this delightful fact, that while the sun is setting to us, he is actually rising somewhere else, perhaps cheering the benighted traveller, gladdening the shepherd on the hills, and scattering light and gladness over half the world. Think of these things sometimes, dearest. They will do your poor heart good. And now, look out again—for Arnold’s sake look out. Why, positively the dear fellow has placed us almost in the midst of a garden. Let us open this little casement. I do believe I can smell sweet briar, my favourite scent. Is it not so, Arnold?”

Arnold ran out and gathered his mother a small sprig.



Perhaps he had no right to do so, but the impulse was too strong for him.

"I always thought you were the best mother in the world," said he, placing the sweet briar in her hand; "and now I only wish it was a sprig of pearls and diamonds for your sake."

"In the mean time, while I wait for my diamonds," said Mrs. Lee, smiling, "do tell me by what happy chance you met with this snug little place?"

"Do you think it rather snug?" asked Arnold, looking enquiringly into his mother's face.

"Extremely," was her kind reply; and it was made with such perfect sincerity, that his anxious mind was effectually solaced; and from that hour he never again beheld the little cottage so utterly destitute of comfort, as it had appeared to him on first placing his foot upon the threshold that day.

Harmless, and scarcely felt by him, were now the unrestrained and piteous exclamations of Betsy, who, on entering the little tenement, could do nothing but clasp her hands and cry. Unlike her mistress, she knew not the gentle art of being pleased because a kind and loving one had striven hard to please. A miserable little cottage was a miserable cottage to her, and she had no looks or language to convey an idea that she felt it to be anything else.

"After all," as Mrs. Lee persisted in maintaining, "the place was not so bad; and Arnold had chosen well in selecting for them so secluded a retreat." It was true, also, that they were surrounded by many picturesque and pleasant objects; and but for the extreme homeliness of the tenement itself, it might have been almost pretty. One great advantage attaching to the situation was, that the



owner of the cottage was a market gardener, his widowed mother and himself the occupants of another small apartment on the opposite side of the narrow, sanded passage, and with such persons there seemed every probability that great peace and quietness might be found in their dwelling.

Mrs. Lee was ingenious in discovering favourable features in the character of their abode; but the great charm of her doing so consisted in the perfect sincerity with which she pointed out, first one thing, and then another, to be dwelt upon with satisfaction. After Betsy, with many tears and many promises to visit them early the following morning, had at last consented to leave the family in their humble abode, Mrs. Lee brought forward another recommendation which had not been mentioned before, observing, that one of the greatest beauties of the place to her, was that of its being a *real bona fide cottage*—not a poor town lodging; for she continued, “I can now venture to express what I never could have hinted in the presence of our good and faithful Betsy; there was something in the home to which she first conducted us which a little offended my taste. But here all is in harmony; and, beyond a mere matter of taste, we have now the inexpressible satisfaction of feeling that our situation is also in harmony with our means.”

Arnold and his mother then sat down, fairly and honestly to themselves and each other to talk over the actual position in which they were placed, and what it would be possible for each to accomplish towards the general good. But first, the careful mother conducted her daughter to the little bed-room already prepared for their reception, with no mean idea of comfort and respectability. It was evident that neat and cleanly hands had been there;

and when Lucy's scanty wardrobe was unpacked, and her poor aching head laid softly on her pillow, and the chapter read beside her bed, by the gentle voice which had so often sung her to sleep, in what seemed now her childhood's far off days, when the solemn prayer had been uttered at the foot of that lowly couch, even Lucy's troubled soul was soothed, and, weary with her long weeping, she insensibly resigned herself to sleep.

It was then that the more earnest consultation of the mother and the son began, and midnight found them still conversing, still comforting each other, though almost destitute of comfort in themselves. Oh, blessed link of human kindness, which binds us to each other by the mutual power of creating happiness for those we love, when simply for our own satisfaction or enjoyment we should know not where in the wide world to look!

Long, long, were the consultations of the mother and the son that night. Lucy was a mystery to them both; and they ventured to hint this to each other, though without eliciting any further light upon the painful subject.

"So cheerful formerly," said Mrs. Lee, "and so entirely careless about all those little points of luxury and indulgence which we have now had to sacrifice, so long as those she loved were near her, I cannot read aright the history of her present state of mind. One thing, however, seems to me most certain; she must have occupation."

"The very medicine I would prescribe for her," replied Arnold. "What think you of these wax flowers?"

"If we could obtain a sale for them," observed Mrs. Lee, "there might be good come out of it, beyond the simple occupation."

"Never despair," said Arnold; "I will make inquiry to-morrow. But, first, we must have the materials; what

if I should surprise her, by bringing home all that she wants for this beautiful art; and she could not be better situated, you know, for obtaining studies from life."

By the time the alarm clock in the little parlour had struck the first hour of the morning, all had been arranged between Mrs. Lee and Arnold for this agreeable surprise to Lucy; and they both retired to their humble beds with a sense of quiet satisfaction, arising out of this idea; so cheering it is, when at the lowest depth of misery, to lay hold of the merest straw, which seems for a moment to promise life and hope.

The next day this pleasant purpose of Arnold's was put in practice, though not until the time of his return at a late hour; and perhaps it was well for the success of his plan that Lucy had had a long day of nothingness of which to become thoroughly weary, before her brother laid upon the little table, at which she was seated in listless inaction, the interesting packet containing all the materials which he had been accustomed to procure for her, when she practised this art under very different circumstances.

For the first time a look of animation, almost amounting to joy, diffused itself over Lucy's countenance, as she opened out the mysterious packet, and then, on discovering its contents, looked up into her brother's face. That simple, truthful, and expressive look penetrated directly to his heart, and bore along with it a sense of gratitude and joy beyond what any language could have imparted. It was but momentary, however. How wretchedness seems to chide its victim for forgetting, even for an instant, to be wretched; and the smile that flits across the melancholy countenance has to be paid for by an agony poignant as the sting of conscience; as if it were an act of treason to be glad. "What is this to me?" is then the language of



the stricken soul; and the fruit which had already touched the lip drops from the hand, as worthless and as bitter as the apples which lie upon the shores of the Dead Sea.

"What is this to me?" said the sorrowing heart of the poor girl, as she hid her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

But her brother fondly kissed those gentle hands, and wiped away the tears, and talked to her in his kind sympathising voice of things so foreign to her griefs, that while the tones he uttered soothed her troubled spirit, the words were such as took her thoughts away, and fixed them where there was no pain to suffer.

At last the weeping girl grew interested in what her brother said. The thought of helping too—helping at such a crisis those who were both so willing and so much in need—was a most pleasant thought, and warmed her heart, giving her something like new life. Flowers had ever been her great delight, and to arrange and place them to advantage one of her great points of taste and skill. This occupation seemed to be a portion of her very being. She lived with flowers, as if they were sweet sisters; and the voice of nature, that speaks to so many hearts in melody, spoke to hers through their delicious perfumes. This, then, was not a time to cast aside the loved and lovely from her touch. Poor in all else to her, the world was rich in flowers.

"Yes, Arnold," she said, recovering from her fit of weeping, "I will begin again, if you will help me, and keep me up."

"I will," said Arnold, delighted with her resolution. "My mother will help you, too; and only think, Lucy, if we two could maintain that blessed creature by our industry!"



Lucy for one moment seemed to catch the fervour of her brother's enthusiasm ; and if it died away the next, it was not for that the less sincere or earnest while it lasted. Her resolution, however, was less transient. Day after day her purpose was sustained, and ere a week had passed away, her brother was delighted to behold upon the cottage table a group of flowers as beautiful as any which Lucy ever had completed.

The next thing was to obtain a purchaser ; and here, although Arnold boasted and spoke confidently, his own heart misgave him ; but he determined, nevertheless, to make the attempt.

One must know very little of the world of business, to calculate very much upon the sale of anything sent by the poor, however pretty, to take its chance in the acceptance of the rich ; and day by day the inquiring look which Lucy cast towards her brother on his return grew fainter and more hopeless, until one evening he came with actual money in his hand ; and with such a countenance of radiant joy, he might have gained a prize in some great lottery. It was the small price of one little group of flowers, but still it was her own, and the earning of her industry.

"What ails you, Lucy?" asked her brother eagerly, on seeing that she did not participate in his triumph.

Lucy laid her finger on her lip, and looked towards her mother ; and Arnold waited impatiently until they two could speak alone.

"What is it, Lucy?" said he, as soon as Mrs. Lee had left the room.

Lucy was pale and breathless, and evidently much disturbed.

"I know not what to tell you, Arnold," she replied.





*Again, that shadow*

"Perhaps you will say that I was dreaming, but I know I was not. No, I was only thinking very earnestly, and busy with this lily of the valley, wondering why these little bells and this broad leaf should always look so sad, when suddenly a shadow passed the window—a shadow like my father."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Arnold.

"I knew you would tell me it was impossible, and so I thought it the first time."

"What, did you see it twice?"

"Not see it exactly, I rather *felt* it; for there it was again. I could not be deceived."

"Imagination can do much in cases of this kind, Lucy? My father could not, would not, dare to linger near this spot, of all places in the world."

"It was his spirit, then, Arnold; for as sure as I am now that you and I are talking, so sure I feel that once, and yet again, that frightful shadow fell upon the window-pane."

"You must not tell my mother what you think, Lucy, even though it should be but a fancy, as I am sure it must."

"My mother? Oh, not for worlds! But what shall I do, Arnold? I feel so terrified. I dare not be alone."

"Go on with your work, Lucy—command your thoughts—be very still, and pray. Pray for that wretched man—I cannot call him father."

"Oh, Arnold! you and I might possibly have been as bad, if we had been without our mother. Who knows but he was motherless—friendless—godless—in his youth. I never heard him speak of any one who had cared about his childhood. Let us two, Arnold, try to be kind and pitiful to others, whatever they may be to us."

It was thus the gentle creature felt, and thus she spoke



the language of her soul; for no bitterness dwelt there towards any human being. There was one name she could not have uttered, had it been to save her life—one form she would not have seen, could the sight have brought a fortune to her feet; but she was a stranger to resentment even here; and the burning thoughts which ever and ever brought that image back, and placed it by her side, and made it speak to her again, in dreams by day and night, were none of them injurious or bad thoughts. Yet they were thoughts that were eating away her very life, notwithstanding; and this strange vision of her father, so startling and so awful in connection with her last interview with him, seemed now, to her disordered fancy, almost like a dark messenger from the world of spirits.

## CHAPTER XXII



It was not likely that the lady of Sir James Crawford should give her popular parties, should make herself a favourite with people in general, and thus be much talked about, flattered, and admired, without having her humble imitators amongst persons who struggled to work their way to distinction by being her distinguished friends. Of these the amiable Mrs. Norris was the most pliant, at the same time that she was the most persevering; for she could edge herself into any corner likely to be penetrated by Lady Crawford's notice, and maintain, by an undeviating system of good management, a sort of parallel course with her ladyship, distinct, yet as similar as circumstances could possibly allow.

The good management of Mrs. Norris was indeed worthy of the name; for if that of Mrs. Ashley had an uniform tendency to show how that immaculate lady had done, was doing, and should do, perfectly right to the end of the world, the good management of Mrs. Norris tended equally to show how everything turned out happily for herself, her household, and her friends in general; and we all know that the grand requisite for being always happy,

is to believe oneself so. Thus it was that Mrs. Norris lived in perpetual sunshine. She was, in her own person, a very lady-like and pretty woman, with, at times, a little anxious, worn look about her face, as if the sunshine was from without, rather than within, and required a good deal of keeping up, or rather of adjusting herself to, in the place where it was likely to fall ; but as this was the sole business of her life, it was very fortunate that she succeeded so often as to be seldom in shade.

Mrs. Norris had married a gentleman much older than herself, whose three sons were about settling in the world at the time of her happy union with the "dearest of all good men." This dear and much-eulogised individual should have been seen, in order fully to appreciate the extent to which some people's sunshine can be stretched. It is true he was no shadow in his wife's bright hemisphere, but rather capable of casting a shadow far and wide ; for he was personally of enormous magnitude, far gone into the pantaloon-and-slipper stage of life, with bald head and ruddy countenance, which his wife persisted in calling *fine*, and even made studies of in idea, and pointed him out as such to her friends, in certain attitudes, or lights, or shadows, for nothing came amiss to this lady's talent for beholding the beautiful.

It might have operated as a wholesome cure for some enthusiasts in that line, to hear Mrs. Norris descant upon such themes. She had the artists' cant expressions ever ready, too, and talked about the charming "*bits*" which she discovered here and there. Alas ! for the world, that there are not more Mrs. Norrises to cure it of its cant—not that of art alone, nor of religion, although the nobler the theme the greater the indignity, injustice, and abuse ; but the cant of fashion, of learning, of everything, in

short, which is and ought to be common to all, but which, being clothed in language unmeaning in itself, and incomprehensible to the uninitiated, becomes a mystery unsolved, wondered at, and often either under or over-estimated, simply because it is unknown or misunderstood; for if, on the one hand, we lose sight of the true value of what in itself is good, because men speak of it in language unintelligible to our ears; on the other, we blindly follow an *ignis fatuus*, believing it will guide us aright, because men point it out by what is no better to us than dumb show, and impose upon our credulity by words which make no appeal to truth or common sense.

The amiable Mrs. Norris did her part towards the reformation of the world, though quite unconsciously, by laying hold of these conventionalities wherever she could find them, and making them her own; and they flowed so softly from her pretty mouth, that no one ever in the least suspected to what extent they were sometimes got up for the occasion. No one ever suspected either, that Mrs. Norris had not been born to the elegance and easy circumstances which she now enjoyed; it was sufficient for the town of M—— that Mr. Norris had, once upon a time, brought home a beautiful young bride to the handsome house which he possessed in one of the principal streets of that busy town; and that they had ever since been in the habit of giving excellent dinners there. This was quite sufficient for any one who visited them to know; and when Mrs. Norris floated about her richly-furnished drawing-room, saying sweet and pretty things to each one of her various guests—especially when the wine for the gentlemen, and the coffee for the ladies, were acknowledged to be the very best—a large portion of the inhabitants of the town of M—— were of the opinion that the parties at the



Norris was quite equal to those at Sir James Crawford's. This opinion, however, remained to be very much confined to the guests who did *not* visit with Sir James and his lady.

The species of rivalry kept up between Mrs. Norris and her friend Lady Crawford—for they were, expressly on her part, the most *intimate* friends in the world—could not possibly, under such circumstances, be at all of an envious or hostile nature. So far from this, Mrs. Norris could go about, very sweetly disputing such points with her guests, and really wondering at their tastes, when they preferred anything of hers to a similar thing at Waverton, the residence of Sir James. She, for her part, could not possibly think as they did ; and then would follow the most elaborate praises of all that belonged to her friend, with, perhaps, one little flaw or exception. Somehow or other, there was always *one*.

It may readily be supposed that to keep up the life, and spring, and interest of her parties, was a great point with Mrs. Norris, and a point not easily made sure of, with such a leaden husband as presided with her over these festive scenes ; who, when his dinner was over, and his wine finished, had literally finished his day ; and who, in the whole course of his life, had never been known to be drawn into a conversation after tea. It was then, in fact, that he became a study—a *fine* study, as Mrs. Norris was pleased to say, in pointing him out to her friends—the noble line of the forehead and nose clearly developed, and altogether the contour such as Rembrandt would have revelled in. The good lady meant Rubens, but this slight misnomer was a trifle in her vocabulary of set phrases, where the particular mode of expression was the first object of consideration, not the thing expressed.

It was difficult, however, even with the aid of this fine study, for Mrs. Norris to make much of her parties in themselves ; and, consequently, she was extremely anxious to lay hold of any stray foreigner, or other *rara avis* likely to prove a distinguished object, and thus capable of being turned to some account. From the fact of living in a busy mercantile town, she was not without some happy opportunities of this kind ; and now and then a whiskered Pole, a pale Italian, a smoke-dried German, or a traveller who had seen the Pyramids, was brought to figure as the centre of attraction in her evening parties. Besides which, Mrs. Norris had an insatiable thirst after characters distinguished in themselves, and authors and authoresses at one time took the lead of all other articles in demand ; until a critic of high authority happened one day to remark in her hearing, upon such being the passion for literary composition, that it had become much more extraordinary to meet a person who had *not* written a book than one who had.

From this moment Mrs. Norris grew a little more shy of her literary friends, and directed her attention to characters whose express business and calling it was to figure in society. Finding, however, that some of these had already met each other a few times too often, and finding also that to each one positively agreeable, there needed at least one negatively so, to fill the place of a good listener ; or in other words, to act as an undercharged recipient of the electric fire which must necessarily be struck off in order to render the party either brilliant or amusing, other characters were studiously sought out, and admitted, not without a quick perception of the part they filled successfully, or otherwise, accompanied by careful calculations as to the desirableness of their being invited again.

In some of the parties at Waverton, Mrs. Norris had fine pickings of this kind. Here she could look about, and make her observations in safety, enjoying all the advantage of seeing the experiment tried, before risking anything on her own account. Thus, whenever a party appeared to be pleasantly grouped together, they were carefully noted down ; whenever a laugh was heard, or a jest enjoyed, Mrs. Norris took the name and address of the jester ; and whenever one distinguished individual took the lead in conversation at Waverton, he was sure not to wait long before he had the opportunity of doing the same at the house of Mr. Norris.

It happened on the evening when Dorothy Dalrymple made her first appearance in the world, that Mrs. Norris was one of the guests at Waverton ; nor was it long before she discovered that Dorothy would be likely to turn out well for her purposes. The fact of having first met her at Sir James Crawford's was a sufficient guarantee for her being perfectly introducable ; and there was a striking air about her, and a *naïveté* and piquancy in what she said, which contrasted richly with the worn-out sayings and doings of society in general, and promised well for her future popularity, provided she had the good sense and tact not to let herself down. Who and what she really was, Mrs. Norris neither asked nor cared, beyond the fact of meeting her at Waverton. She was a dark-eyed, flashing girl, who laughed well, and drew the gentlemen around her, and Mrs. Norris decided accordingly upon making her acquaintance.

A very early call had consequently been made upon the Dalrymples, and finding Dorothy at home, the first overtures towards an intimacy were easily entered upon, and accepted, as fraught with hopeful promise for both parties ;

for here there was no overwhelming rank or splendour to throw the abashed and ignorant girl into greater obscurity, no striking superiority to wound her pride, and no personal advantages, beyond a pretty form and face, to render the acquaintance painfully unequal.

“Here, then,” thought Dorothy, “I can see the world at my ease, do just as I like with this good lady, who seems to be so very pliant, and what is still better, I can be my own natural self. If I cannot dance, I can tell the truth, and shall have no need to sprain my ankle again.”

Perhaps Dorothy miscalculated a little the extent of the liberty she was likely to enjoy. Perhaps she forgot, that while the parties by whom she would be surrounded might be different, her own impulses would be the same. But thus it is through life, we look to external circumstances for effecting those important changes which can at any time be carried on within ourselves, though not without the agency of influences with which such circumstances have often little or no connection. One simple, hearty resolve, made prayerfully, and humbly, in the sight of God, that come what would to herself in what is called society, she would use no more falsehoods to effect her purposes, would have done more for Dorothy in the way of establishing her character on a surer and nobler foundation, than all the favourable circumstances which ever met together in the experience of one human being. And this is precisely what we often so much need, when we hope, and wish, and fear, and wonder, and calculate probabilities, and play with resolution, until the strong temptation comes upon us, and then we fall—abashed, repentant, and astonished at our own weakness.

On the first appearance of Dorothy Dalrymple in one



whether her introduction there would answer the end desired or not. Mrs. Norris was not, like Lady Crawford, sufficient of herself to establish the sure footing of any otherwise questionable personage thus introduced ; and, notwithstanding the ease and self-possession which Dorothy endeavoured to assume, there was still an abruptness in her remarks, and an unfinished air about her altogether, which betrayed but too plainly how little she had been accustomed to society. Her dress too—Mrs. Norris wished she had only seen her to arrange her hair before she came into the room—it was the smallest fraction of an inch too much upon her forehead—and that curl which fell into her neck behind—why curls were not worn there, according to the mode of the existing month ; she must really have the dressing of the girl herself if she was to be responsible for her introduction to society.

Nor was the doubtful nature of the experiment unperceived by Dorothy herself. She now and then detected sharp eyes directed to her lace—eyes that looked very cognizant of its reality. Once or twice she was addressed on subjects of which it was unpardonable to be ignorant, such as the silver *épergne* of a certain alderman, then exhibited for show in certain public rooms ; and each time that she ventured upon an original remark herself, her auditors looked strange, and blank, as if she had spoken in an unknown tongue.

“ No wonder Mrs. Norris finds her parties flat,” thought Dorothy, as she trudged home on foot that night with the faithful Bridget by her side. “ I must do something to rouse these leaden people out of their dullness and stupidity, and then I dare say they will all be delighted with me, and I shall become quite popular.”

With this determination, Dorothy set her busy wits to

work, and in a call which she made on Mrs. Norris the following morning, she was about to suggest the introduction of some little variety into her evening's amusements ; when, to her unspeakable surprise, that lady launched out into the warmest eulogiums upon her charming party, and the interest and satisfaction which every one, on taking leave, had described themselves as having felt.

"What sweet, amiable friends you must have," observed Dorothy, with a slight curl on her lip, which Mrs. Norris was the last woman in the world to detect.

"No one is more happy in their friends," she responded. "It is really sometimes quite a tax upon me, their fondness for coming here ; and I do assure you, Mrs. Marrowson has almost invited herself again for next week."

"Did you tell her of the venison you have in store ?" asked Dorothy.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Norris.

"And of the two German princes ?"

"I believe I spoke of them to all my friends."

"It was only kind to do so," observed Dorothy. "Perhaps you will think me impertinent," she ventured to add, "but I have been thinking this inexhaustible kindness of yours may be a little too much taxed ; and that perhaps I could assist you in getting up something in the way of amusement for an evening or so. What do you think of acting charades ? My aunt tells me they were very popular at Lord Dalgeney's, the winter she spent in the highlands. They were fresh from Paris, I believe, at that time, and I don't hear of them being much known or talked about here."

Mrs. Norris looked profoundly interested. An amusement fresh from Paris ? popular at the residence of a highland nobleman ? The thing promised well. What if she

should introduce it, and it should really go off well? Perhaps this raw girl might be just what she wanted, after all

“ My aunt would know all about it,” added Dorothy. “ You would find her a most useful person, and accustomed to the best society.”

“ Indeed !” responded Mrs. Norris, with a secret wonder as to how much might be made of her, too. But the prospect was too encouraging to be lost sight of; and as she was already dressed for going out in her carriage, Mrs. Norris proposed to take Dorothy with her, then to call upon her aunt, and if agreeable to all parties, to drive both ladies round a newly planted park, or sweep, which had lately become a place of fashionable resort to the inhabitants of M——.

Never, perhaps, had aunt Anne been in a happier mood and temper altogether, than on this auspicious morning. The soft luxury of a rolling carriage, from which she had so long been debarred, seemed to give her fresh youth, and more bouyant spirits; and such was the lively and animated account which she gave of the amusement of acting charades—an entertainment not then so generally known as at present, that an early day was fixed upon, and guests especially selected, who would be likely not only to appreciate, but to take part in, the representations of the evening.

Between that and the eventful day, it may easily be supposed that Dorothy and her aunt conversed and planned about little else than the charades; and if words were suggested and fixed upon with strict reference to the conspicuous part which Dorothy was to act, the spinster was no less intent upon adapting the business she had undertaken to her own skilful arrangement, of which she held no mean opinion, but which she prudently considered

might be taxed beyond a reasonable extent. She knew too, and here was the secret of her power, what had *gone off well*, what had been acted at Dalgeney Castle, and in which character lady Dalgeney herself had obtained the most universal applause.

These names, and the confidence and familiarity with which they dwelt upon the lips of aunt Anne, were so many sounds of rich promise to Mrs. Norris, like a peal of merry bells ushering in a new enjoyment; and but that a little girl in a family on whom she called in the happy round which announced the amusement of the coming evening, unluckily observed that charades had long been acted at Mrs. Lashmores, where her cousins were at school; and but that the wife of an alderman, on the same day, had shrugged her shoulders, and called it "child's play;" and that the wife of a doctor, who looked as if she fed on camomile, had coldly observed, that she did not think Mrs. Norris would find it answer her purpose; the pleasing anticipations of that lady would have exceeded all previous bounds. As it was, she remained in a state of the highest excitement until the eventful day, inwardly congratulating herself upon her good fortune in having picked up two such useful characters as Dorothy and her aunt.

"There is a good deal *in* that girl," said she, shaking her sapient head; "and when I have dressed her, and brought her out a little, I do believe she will take."



## CHAPTER XXIII.



XCITEMENT and pleasure seemed now to be crowding upon Dorothy Dalrymple from more quarters than one. At one moment she was busy and intent upon the characters in which she intended to appear, preparing costumes, and practising attitudes again before her tiny glass ; at another, she was turning over sketches and pencil-drawings ; and, we grieve to say, with a slight sense of dissatisfaction at the recollection that she was now pledged to her father to pursue her once favourite occupation with that system and method which alone could ensure her success. And what was success ? Had Dorothy asked of her heart that question, and answered it faithfully, it might have saved her a world of trouble, of failures, and of disappointments.

“ I must draw to-day, however,” said Dorothy, on the evening before the party, “ for my young master comes to teach me at twelve o’clock. I wonder what kind of hobledehoy he will prove to be. I dare say he will have on his first tail coat, with sleeves that will not reach to his hands by half a yard. Well, I shall make the lesson a very short one, that I can tell him beforehand, for I must

make this turban up myself. By the way, it strikes me I have been intended for a sibyl, or perhaps a witch ; and saying this, Dorothy let fall her raven hair, which floated over her neck and shoulders, and with a yellow turban surmounting her glossy tresses, she was holding in her hand a little pocket-glass, looking in it this way and that, and vainly endeavouring to form some idea as to general effect, when, startled by the sound of an opening door, she turned round, and beheld a very fine looking young gentleman ushered in by Bridget,—no other than Arnold Lee, the young drawing-master himself.

If ever in her life Dorothy Dalrymple had looked handsome, it was at that embarrassing moment, while a sense of the absurdity of her dilemma sent a crimson flush into her cheeks, and while her natural propensity to burst into a fit of ungovernable laughter lighted up her whole countenance with an expression of liveliness and fun, so intense, as almost for a moment to drive away the gloom from Arnold's brow and heart.

Perhaps the best thing they could both do was to laugh out the jest ; and Dorothy soon explained sufficiently the strangeness of her appearance, feeling all the time that she had in her drawing-master a very different person to deal with from what, an hour before, her imagination had pictured.

Hastening up to her own room, she soon prepared herself for serious application to the work in hand ; and during her absence, Arnold recollected, for the first time since his new engagement, the scene in the balcony where he had first beheld this strange and animated creature, not less strange, and scarcely less animated, now that he recognised her under different circumstances.

It may, perhaps, tell unfavourably for the gallantry of

Arnold Lee, that he had not recollected this before ; and some young gentlemen, no doubt, would still have been carrying about with them that captured handkerchief, which had once been snatched so manfully ; but Arnold had passed through deep waters since that bright morning ; and, in truth, he had had too much to think about, to occupy himself with the vagaries of an idle girl. Still it did appear to him by no means an unpleasant coincidence that here he should be, by the merest chance in the world, thrown into the extraordinary position of assisting this very girl in the pursuit of a study, which, above all others, was gratifying to his own taste—it did seem, despite all the anxieties which pressed upon his soul, a pleasant little episode in the too serious drama of his present life.

Dorothy re-entered the room with an extremely grave countenance, and prepared herself in a very business-like manner for receiving the promised lesson. It was strange to see her thus subdued ; but there was that about Arnold Lee, pleasant, and frank, and gentlemanly as he was, which forbade at once that he should be trifled with ; and perhaps, if the whole secret of his pupil's heart had been known, she had already begun to think it no mean occupation to learn to draw under such a master.

To the drawing lesson, then, they both applied themselves ; for Arnold knew too well the requirements of his position to dream of anything but discharging his duty, with what ability he could command. It was true, he had never taught any one before, and it was equally true that his pupil was little practised in the art of obeying instruction of any kind ; but his object was a simple and direct one, and from that it would not have been easy to divert his attention ; no, not even for those dark, laughing eyes, that sometimes ventured to look up from beneath their long

lashes, as if bent upon discovering whether he had ever laughed in his whole life.

And what was Arnold thinking of when he detected those strangely curious glances? He was wondering whether those eyes had ever *wept*—whether they *could* weep; and what, in all the sad vicissitudes of life, would ever make them weep.

“Are you really fond of drawing?” asked Arnold; for he felt that his business lay in the lesson, and not in the eyes.

“I could be,” replied Dorothy. “I could be passionately fond of it, if——”

“If you understood it, perhaps you mean,” said Arnold; for she hesitated.

“No, I don’t mean that exactly. I mean if I could draw well. I believe I should be fond of anything that I could do really well.”

“You will certainly draw well if you persevere; but there are many intermediate steps to be taken first.”

“Ah! it is those never-ending intermediate steps that baffle me in whatever I undertake. Is there nothing I can leap into at once?”

“Nothing but folly, that I am acquainted with,” replied Arnold, with the gravity of a sage.

Dorothy blushed, and bit her lip; but she looked more serious than before, and made some very deep lines, and then dashed off a bold piece of foreground in her own way, as if determined to set her master at defiance.

“Do you like that?” asked Arnold, very coolly.

“I like doing it,” replied Dorothy.

“But do you like it when it is done? Because, if you do, I am afraid I cannot very much assist you. It is a great thing in learning to draw, to learn first what *is* good



drawing; for if we set out with a false notion of perfection, we never can attain what is real."

"Is *your* drawing perfection?" asked Dorothy.

"By no means," replied Arnold, still cool and self-possessed, though not insensible to the meaning implied in this question. "As a work of art, I have never accomplished anything worth a thought; but in perspective I don't think I am far wrong, for I have paid much attention to the subject."

"I thought you were going to instruct me in perspective," observed Dorothy, not in the most conciliatory manner.

"So I will, when you desire to learn," replied Arnold; "but at present you appear to prefer a drawing in which all the objects it contains are crowded into the foreground, apparently occupying only one distance."

"Ah! now I understand!" exclaimed Dorothy, quite forgetting her ill-humour in the real interest she felt in the subject. "Everything in my drawing comes near, stands forward, and so presents a confused mass in which I see nothing to think about after the piece is finished. Yours has a distance—an atmosphere—a far-off character about it; as if one could take a long, pleasant, summer day's walk through it, and yet scarcely reach the last outline. This, for instance, is a very simple picture, and yet I find in it so much to think about. I could sit for half a day and muse upon it, and wonder what scenes would open out upon me when I had reached this point, what lovely valley would lie here below this woody knoll, whether I should hear the bees hum in the cottager's garden, when I had traced the footpath along this copse. Ah! I shall never draw in this manner. It is more like singing an extempore ballad, than anything I have ever accomplished with my black strokes."

Arnold could not help laughing, in spite of himself, at the multitude of pleasant fancies which had been attached to his simple drawing ; and he was not a little pleased to discover in his pupil a degree of poetical enthusiasm, seldom found except in connection with capabilities for the pursuit of art in its highest excellence.

“ You appear to me,” he said, “ already to have advanced far in idea beyond those intermediate steps which you despise. I am afraid it will be only the more difficult for you to go back in practice, far, far below the heights to which your imagination has soared.”

“ That is precisely the secret of all my miseries,” exclaimed Dorothy. “ I picture to myself some ideal excellence—I burn to attain it, and look here !”

As she said this, she held up first one of her drawings, and then another, and then tore them deliberately into shreds, until they formed a considerable heap on the floor, upon which she placed her foot, as if it was a pleasure to trample them down into the dust.

“ Again,” she continued, “ I thought I should be happy if I could sing and play. I fancied there was music in my soul—the echo of something far off, that came to me in dreams, and on still evenings when the moon was shining upon rippling water. It was like a voice which called to me for ever from the stars, the flowers, the winds, the ocean, and I could not answer it in words. So I teased my father into granting me this instrument on which I was to learn, and now you shall listen !”

And Dorothy sat down to the old piano, and touching a few inharmonious notes, so mimicked the shrill tones with her own voice, as to create a most laughable and yet intolerable discord.

“ There !” she exclaimed, springing up again, “ you

hear what I can do, what I ever shall do. And yet the voice is calling to me still. Oh! teach me how to answer. If I cannot sing to it, teach me to answer in images of beauty, in things that have their likeness in the blue heavens, the glorious earth, the everlasting hills! I see you think I am mad. I sometimes think I am so myself; and surely nothing ever was more like it, than that, to you a perfect stranger, I should pour out my heart in this manner. But there is something in your countenance, much as you despise me, with my cap and bells—there is something in your countenance which tells me that you understand me. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps it is."

"I have no brother, sister, or mother. I never knew what it was to be understood. Look at my situation. I have lived always here alone—alone! Like a bird born in its cage, I have wings, but I know not what it is to fly."

"May he who cares for the young sparrow keep you from flying until you are better prepared than now!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you might dash yourself against a rock, and perish, or perhaps attempt to cross an ocean before you had strength to reach the shore."

Dorothy fell into a deep reverie, which ended by her saying, "This is a strange lesson on the art of drawing."

"It is," replied Arnold, "and I am afraid my time is nearly expired."

"Are you in haste, then?"

"My time is not my own."

"How so?"

"Because I serve a master now, and my time is his, not mine!"

"Do you like to serve a master?"

"Naturally, I most assuredly do not; but under present circumstances, I do."

"What are those circumstances? But perhaps I ought not to ask."

"Ah! there lies a long story, a very sad one too. It would weary you too much, were I to tell you."

"I don't think it would weary me. I should like very much to know."

Arnold looked intently into the countenance of the speaker. He would have liked exceedingly to ascertain in what way she wished so much to know. Was it a touch of real sympathy at that moment thrilling through her heart; or was it merely in the same way that she would have gone to see a tragedy—for the pleasure of the excitement naturally awakened by the contemplation of suffering?

"Ah!" said he to himself, after pursuing these mental inquiries, "I should know better if I could but see those bright eyes weep!"

It was true enough that the time specified for Arnold's lesson on drawing had expired, and that, as the faithful servant of a strict master, he could no longer remain, even had brighter eyes than those of Dorothy Dalrymple invited him to stay. She, however, knew better, with such a character, than to attempt to divert him from pursuing that strict line of duty which it was evident he had marked out for himself. The first drawing lesson was accordingly concluded, and arrangements entered into for pursuing the study on a future occasion.

"And now for my cap and bells!" said Dorothy, taking up some portions of her fanciful costume again, as soon as Arnold was gone. But, somehow or other, the light drapery dropped from her fingers, the ribbon she was tying



fell to the ground, and the whole business of preparation for the evening's amusement assumed a totally different character in her eyes from that which it had worn a single hour before.

Long and deep was the reverie in which Dorothy lost herself, until at last, startled by the entrance of her aunt, she recollected and resumed her occupation ; but it was scarcely with the same zest ; and when her aunt inquired lightly and scornfully how the *lad* had conducted himself, the indignation which thrilled through Dorothy's heart mounted up to her eyes and temples, and displayed itself in burning blushes on her cheek.

"I should like to see the result of the morning's lesson," observed the spinster. "May I ask what has been done? Ah, now I see. The children have been at play," she went on, as her eye caught the scattered fragments on the floor. "I should have thought my wise brother might have anticipated something like this. At all events, I shall now be able to enlighten him on the absurdity of this child's play."

"Aunt Anne," said Dorothy, and she now stood up with that commanding look and attitude which had the power of effectually quelling the weaker spirit of her aunt, "take care how you make mischief betwixt my father and me. It was his wish that I should be taught to draw ; and if I choose to tear this paper into shreds, it is a case for old Bridget to complain of, not for you."

"Upon my word," said aunt Anne, "you are an admirable tragedy queen. I begin to think we shall have a brilliant evening, to-morrow."

"Let us keep each other in countenance, at least," said Dorothy ; "and if we must make fools of ourselves, let us be good-natured fools, at all events."

“Upon my word!” exclaimed aunt Anne again, opening her eyes wider than they had ever been opened before. Everybody knows how these few words *may* be uttered, and what a questioning of “Saul also amongst the prophets” may be conveyed by their sound. Dorothy, however, while understanding all this—for it would have been intelligible to the meanest capacity—determined not to lose her self-possession; not, in fact, to sacrifice to a momentary irritation, the amusement which had already been promised to a large circle of the friends of Mrs. Norris; and she therefore most diligently applied herself to the business in hand; and, as her good humour grew with her work, even condescended to flatter her aunt now and then, so as finally to win her over to a state of great placidity and self-satisfaction.

Thus flew the time until the hour of meeting in Mrs. Norris’s well-lighted drawing-room, where a greater number of guests were assembled than usual, and where Mrs. Norris herself, big with expectation, looked knowingly at Dorothy and her aunt, not forgetting to address the latter, on the first possible opportunity, upon some point of taste, or subject of curiosity, connected with Dalgeny Castle, in the Highlands.

As the spinster answered clearly and methodically, yet in a perfectly familiar manner, to these inquiries, everybody looked towards that part of the room where she was seated. Mrs. Norris consequently found a great deal more to say on the subject, and the spinster launched out into the habits of the Highland gentry in general. Dorothy, too, looked animated and intelligent, sometimes throwing in an appropriate remark, for she was really interested; and as the whisper “Who are they?” crept round the room, Mrs. Norris began to flatter herself that her new guests were *looking up*.

Thus far all things went on extremely well, but they were about to go on a great deal better. So soon as the room was cleared for charades to begin, Dorothy was led out by Mrs. Norris, who only paused at the door to ask if any one else was wanted.

"You are the enchantress now," said the lady of the house, "and you have only to command whom you please."

Dorothy, like many earnest characters, was seldom embarrassed when she had an object to carry out upon which her heart was set. Looking round the room with her bright flashing eyes, she said, with the utmost *naïveté*, "I believe I must beg the favour of a gentleman to act with me?"

In an instant, a tall figure stepped from amongst a group around the fire, and slightly bending on one knee, offered himself in this attitude of mock gallantry to be her companion—assistant—knight—lover—anything or everything she might desire.

Laughingly, Dorothy accepted the offer, and disappeared with her aunt and Mrs. Norris. To her it was of little importance who her companion was, so long as he was capable of being moulded to her will; and without even making herself acquainted with his name, she set about, with the utmost earnestness, to instruct him in the part he was to act. Amongst other directions, she told him, without a blush or a simper, that he must admire her very much; to which the gentleman very naturally replied, that he should not find that a particularly difficult task. And still Dorothy betrayed not the slightest tendency to construe anything he said into a compliment to herself. Her business was to act a charade, not to flirt with a fine gentleman. She had not learned *that* yet. The more was the pity that she ever should. And perhaps it was this very

earnestness—this business-like way of setting about what she had to do, while turned neither to one side nor another, which amused the tall gentlemen, as being something extremely different from what he had been accustomed to meet with.

It was, indeed, no stretch of his gallantry to promise to admire his animated companion, for Dorothy had just the kind of face and figure to tell well in an experiment of this kind. She had a natural talent for acting, too, and threw the whole force of her genius into the character she assumed. Of course it was not a difficult one, or her knowledge of the world would have been at fault. Besides which, she enjoyed all the advantage of having selected it herself, and studied it beforehand. She therefore walked into the room with the most perfect self-possession, and looked, and went through her part so well, that a burst of applause attended her retreat. Inquiries of—"Who is that handsome girl," were then heard amongst the gentlemen; and Mrs. Norris began to feel very much gratified in having made her acquaintance.

"Who is that clever gipsey?" asked Mr. Norris, roused out of his sleep by the tumult of applause. "Did I ever see her before, Susan?"

"My dearest love," remonstrated Mrs. Norris, "you are certainly dreaming still. You forget how often Miss Dalrymple visits here now, how charmed we all are with her society, and what an interesting and dear girl she is."

"Where did you pick her up, Susan?"

"My love," remonstrated the lady again, really shocked at the style of expression which her husband chose to adopt, "Miss Dalrymple and her aunt came directly from the Highlands into this neighbourhood. They are on the



most intimate terms with Lord and Lady Dalgeny, of Dalgeny Castle, and, indeed, with most of the noble families in the north of Scotland."

"But where did *you* find her?" still persisted the half-asleep gentleman; "for I never heard of *your* visiting at Lord Dalgeny's?"

"I met with Miss Dalrymple first at Waverton, at Sir James Crawford's. She is an immense favourite with her ladyship, and visits there constantly."

"Ah, well, I understand it all now, perfectly," said Mr. Norris; and sinking snugly into a softer chair, he composed himself again to sleep, and again became a *study* for the artistic taste of the company.

If Dorothy was admired in the first scene, she was no less wondered at in the second, for her grotesque and comic mimicry of a character in lower life. Perhaps she had learned something from old Bridget. At all events, she kept the company in a roar of laughter, and really acted her part so well, that two young ladies, who had never made any body laugh in all their lives, grew a little envious, and set afloat a whisper that she seemed quite at home in her present character.

The third and final scene, however, effectually put a stop to this amiable suggestion. It afforded scope for much of the latent poetry of Dorothy's taste and feelings; and, while it elicited less noisy applause, it left upon the minds of all who were present, an impression that the young lady in question, whoever she might be, was born to be something very different from the character she had represented in the second scene, as the bar-maid of a country inn.

To see the welcome which Dorothy received from the company after her successful efforts for their entertain-

ment were concluded, to see the crowding of the gentlemen around her, the eagerness of the ladies to enter into conversation with her, and the sensation created by everything she said and did, any one would have pronounced that her position—in relation to that class of society at least—was as effectually established as if she had been ushered into it with a fortune and title to boot. Every sentence which Dorothy now uttered was either comic or profound, only sometimes the younger portion of the ladies mistook which, and laughed when they ought to have been grave ; every attitude she assumed had a character in it, only no one present could have pronounced exactly what that character was ; every expression which flitted across her countenance had a meaning, only few would have been able to interpret its sense. Altogether, Dorothy found herself quite popular, and having once attained a position of distinction, in ever so limited a sphere, it becomes immediately a stepping-stone to other points of distinction lying still beyond.

It was not as in the somewhat higher range of Lady Crawford's evening parties ; for Dorothy could now be entirely herself—as frank and unembarrassed as when conversing with her aunt, or even old Bridget, at home. It is true the two classes were a little intermixed, both Mrs. Norris and many of her friends being frequent visitors at Waverton. But still a slight shade of difference was observable, and things might be said and done at one house, which few would have chosen to risk at the other. This difference Dorothy, from her natural tact, was quick to feel and take advantage of ; and her manners and conversation were consequently easy, frank, and entertaining. Mrs. Norris called her "*brilliant*," and the fact was not disputed by any of her guests.

Of course it was not necessary, when the evening closed, for Dorothy and her aunt, under present circumstances, to have *their carriage* waiting. Old Bridget was ready to attend upon them ; and, as many other visitors, besides themselves, were preparing to walk to their different homes, there was quite a contest amongst the gentlemen as to who should be the privileged companion of the fair enchantress of the evening.

The prior claim of her companion in the charades could not reasonably be disputed ; and Dorothy, without a moment's hesitation, gracefully accepted his offered attentions, leaving her aunt to the care of old Bridget. It struck Dorothy once or twice, during her walk home, that her companion was rather common-place, notwithstanding his fine person and handsome face ; and notwithstanding too, this opportunity so advantageously afforded for the display of playful gallantry in flattering allusions to the intercourse of the evening. It might be that this style of conversation was not exactly suited to her taste, which preferred the development of striking and original ideas, either in herself or others. Hence, the common politeness of common characters went for very little with Dorothy Dalrymple, and thus she would have been more interested in native genius, accompanied by the most uncultivated manners, provided there was no real coarseness of mind, than in the flippant insipidity of a mere drawing-room beau, however handsome, polished, or refined.

Had Dorothy been placed in contact with real genius, it is quite possible the imaginary charm might have been found wanting. Thus far in her experience she had not been tried, and she remained still of the same opinion with regard to human beings as with everything else, that there was, in the creation, something worthy of being supremely

admired, though, as yet, she knew not what. Sometimes, during this day in particular, she had detected a faint symptom of this kind of admiration turning towards the character and form of Arnold Lee ; and often during that evening's exhibition had she wished for his presence, to enhance the plaudits which fell upon her ear. Was it possible that applause, now in its first breath and utterance, was beginning to sound empty and unmeaning without *one* voice ? Ah ! it is a serious want we feel, when the heart first detects, amidst the full peal of the harmony it pines for, that one note is still not there.

The last thing in the world which Dorothy's companion would ever have dreamed of, was that anything could be wanting in him. Delighted with himself and with her, he said more pretty things that night than could possibly have been remembered, even had she deemed them worth treasuring in her memory ; and when they parted, at the door of her father's house, the tones of his voice grew almost tender, as he pressed her hand in his, bidding her reluctantly adieu. Little, indeed, did she think of inquiring, at that moment, how far that silken touch was to lead her, or in what that carelessly made acquaintance was to end.



## CHAPTER XXIV.



IN the same evening on which Dorothy Dalrymple had made so successful an appearance in her new characters at the house of Mr. Norris, her father was at Waverton, in close consultation with Sir James Crawford upon a subject of deep interest to them both; to Sir James, as it related to the commencement of an extensive line of improvements along the shore of the river, where it bounded his hereditary domain—and to his clever agent, as it seemed likely to afford him that kind of *lift* in society which he had always looked forward to, as a sure step towards distinction in the line of his profession.

It was not where the river, creeping on from its mountain recesses, just swelled into a broad and navigable stream above the town of M——, that the rich lands of the Waverton estate stretched along its banks; but beyond the busy town, where its widening waters rolled towards the sea, and often, in stormy weather, presented all the appearance of a troubled ocean themselves. Indeed, it was chiefly from the fact of the encroaching tide gaining more and more upon the land, that the ingenuity of the worthy baronet for years had been employed

in devising a scheme for effectually banking out the water, and preserving his property from devastation.

Every human being is, more or less, the slave of one idea prevailing over every other, and this idea was Sir James Crawford's. Wherever he might be, by whatever company surrounded, if the conversation touched, ever so remotely, a chain of association which could be made to reach the idea of embankment, off went Sir James upon his hobby; and neither yawns, nor hints, nor parties dropping off, nor bells rung for servants, nor coffee ordered in, nor music asked for, nor any other of those signals which perhaps more frequently announce that one thing is wanted to be got rid of, than that another is desired—not any, nor even all these, had ever had the power to put a stop to Sir James's dissertation upon embankments in general, and his own in particular. Nothing short of the actual departure of his guests, and the gradual termination which this effected, had ever been found sufficient to produce the desired result; and, even in these cases, Sir James would linger about the last departing victim, and draw him back again, and hold him by the button, until, failing in all gentler expedients, the unhappy prisoner bolted at last through the open door, at the risk of never being invited to Waverton again.

Perhaps, of all the individuals who composed the numerous circle of Sir James Crawford's friends, Mr. Dalrymple was the only one who had ever heard him out upon the subject of embankments. Entirely exhausted, however, he could not be, for there was no doubt but the art and mystery of embanking would prove to be his "ruling passion strong in death." Mr. Dalrymple, however, had the happy art of listening yet, or appearing to listen; and in all probability he was the exact person who *could* listen longer

than any one else, for to him the subject was fraught with interest most profound.

At the present period of our history, the ideal embankment, so long in being constructed by Sir James, was beginning to assume a practical form ; and many were the hours of earnest consultation during which he and the engineer had been occupied together ; many were the times that Mr. Dalrymple, laden with earnest thought, had issued from a private door at Waverton, at a late hour of the night ; and great was the wonderment of Dorothy, her aunt, and old Bridget, at the bustle and the business which appeared now to be going on in that once silent office.

Of course a very serious interruption took place in the drawing lessons upon which Dorothy had calculated. Whether this interruption disappointed the other party concerned, as well as herself, she had but little opportunity of knowing, for Arnold was called away to be employed upon the site of the new works, and was only able to speak with his pupil before he went, for a very few moments, at his own urgent request.

There was no time for what Mr. Dalrymple called *nonsense* in this interview. Arnold appeared to have no heart for it either. He was evidently distressed, harassed, careworn, yet reluctant to make any allusion to the cause ; and Dorothy, who was almost an entire stranger to the feeling of pity, having had very little pity ever extended towards herself, felt, nearly for the first time in her life, how pleasant it would be to assist such a person as Arnold, and secretly wished it were in her power to do so.

Indeed, this feeling was so strong in her heart, that she said, without a moment's premeditation—"Is there anything I can do for you in your absence?"

"Thank you," replied Arnold ; "that is the very reason

why I have asked to speak to you. There is an excellent servant, a true and faithful friend to my family, just now out of a situation, and in great trouble. She is not in want, nor without friends; but as we have been the means of depriving her of a home for the present, it would be a great satisfaction to know that she was comfortably settled where her valuable services would be estimated at their true worth."

"Ah! if I could prevail upon my father!" exclaimed Dorothy, "such a servant is exactly what I want."

"You?" said Arnold; "I should only be too happy if I could leave her with you, and the person I speak of would really be worth a fortune to you."

"Perhaps supply the want of any other kind of fortune," observed Dorothy, smiling.

"She is the most faithful, generous-hearted creature," said Arnold, intent only upon serving this devoted friend — "a little peculiar to be sure —."

"As peculiar as old Bridget?" asked Dorothy.

"Almost," said Arnold, "in her way, but certainly a few grades higher in her accomplishments, as well as in her knowledge of the world, and of what belongs to good society."

"You are very complimentary," observed Dorothy, again smiling with great good humour. "But I fully understand you, and you are perfectly right. I do indeed require a person of this kind to keep me in order. But I am afraid the individual in question could never be repaid according to her deserts and expectations, in our family."

"I don't think that would be to her an affair of so much importance just now," said Arnold. "She is thinking much more about a heavy affliction which has fallen upon an unfortunate brother of hers, than upon her own per-



sonal affairs ; and, to tell the truth, she is so entirely absorbed in this subject, so earnest in serving him, and so peculiar altogether, that I doubt very much whether she would suit any family in which liberal allowance would not be made for the indulgence of a spirit not easily controlled, where there is injustice to be abused, or helpless innocence to be defended."

" Give me her address," said Dorothy ; " I will do everything I can for her."

" But first," said Arnold, " you must clearly understand that the brother about whom she is just now absolutely raving, has been seized, and imprisoned, on the charge of murder."

Dorothy started, as well she might ; but as Arnold went on to explain the case, dwelling with interest and deep feeling upon the peculiarly distressing circumstances with which it was connected, the ever excitable imagination of his hearer became so fascinated with the *éclat* of mixing herself up with such a story ; in fact, with the prospect of acting the part of defender of the oppressed, and vindicator of the rights of suffering humanity, that she determined, even if she could not succeed in obtaining the services of this admirable woman in her own household, at all events to take up her cause, and devote herself to it until every inhabitant of the town of M—— should be roused in defence of the innocent and injured sufferer.

Little indeed did Arnold imagine what a train he was setting fire to, when he laboured simply on behalf of poor Betsy to provide her with occupation and a home ; or at least to commit her to the kind consideration of some respectable and influential parties, so that her good name might be so far upheld as not to suffer any deterioration from the disgrace attaching to her brother's. Little in-

deed did he understand how much warm-hearted and enthusiastic ladies will undertake, and sometimes accomplish, when their feelings are once thoroughly enlisted in what they believe to be a good cause. If Arnold did not understand this secret of the female character, however, there is no want of those who do ; nor is there any want of ingenuity in discovering practical purposes to which it may be applied ; no want either of means by which this spring of female conduct is reached and set in action, from the highest stimulus of ambition, to the lowest gratification of vanity and self-love.

Arnold Lee was now better able to leave his mother and sister, because the anxieties of all were relieved by the hope of Betsy Burton being likely soon to find a home, in which active duties would divert her thoughts in some measure from the one absorbing theme of interest, by which they were at present harassed almost to distraction.

Poor Betsy had had to experience what so many of her sister sufferers have to learn, how very little people in general care either for sorrow, oppression, or wrong, unless presented to their notice under some interesting form. In vain did Betsy make her case known to different parties high and low, rich and poor. The latter, it is true, spoke with bitterness enough, and so far apparently with some touch of sympathy, but there was no help in them ; and after all, they each went off in their different ways to tell of some father, brother, husband, or poor friend, who had been served in the same manner, or worse ; so that Betsy in the end had to calm down her own indignation, under a show of tenderness for them. And as for the wealthy, and the influential, the impression produced by her eloquence upon them was still less encouraging. They had most of them *had a case*, a very troublesome case, pre-

sented to their notice on the same day ; and they all assured her she need give herself no sort of uneasiness about the matter, but rely implicitly upon the fact that the law would do what was strictly right, and that it would do nothing else.

It is not to be supposed that Dorothy Dalrymple was more feeling, benevolent, or sympathising than the rest of the human race ; and had Betsy presented herself to her notice in her own person, there is every reason to apprehend that her reception would have been no better than with others ; but Arnold had an earnest, touching way of speaking of anything which lay near his heart, and his manly and disinterested ardour was at all times such as easily communicated itself to other minds. Perhaps he was less addicted than many men to the making of fine speeches, which might afterwards be dwelt upon, or quoted ; but while few persons remembered the exact words he had uttered when conversing with them, there were many who felt in his presence a kind of exhilarating, healthy, and ennobling influence, derived entirely from the tone and character of his own spirit, whose impress was written upon his bold, clear forehead, revealing itself no less in the earnest but luminous gaze of his full, fine eyes, than in the simple, but direct and truthful language in which he always spoke.

Even to the solitary but enthusiastic girl, whose higher feelings never had been called forth, it seemed almost as if she grew better in his presence ; as if she might safely yield herself to any impulse which his conversation inspired, and become more noble while she did so. Hence her willingness to imbibe the spirit in which he spoke of the situation of a faithful servant, and the energy with which she subsequently took up her cause, as that of the loftiest virtue suffering under disgrace and wrong.



In the meantime, while Dorothy was pondering upon what would be the most likely means to induce her father to admit an additional member into his family, for her own especial benefit, Lady Crawford, in her easy, good natured manner, had introduced the very same idea to his notice, under a different and much more favourable form. Hitherto it had perhaps never even crossed the mind of the father, that his idle, hair-brained, ignorant daughter could be made to serve the purposes of his ambition in any way whatever. It is true he had of late begun to regard her personally in a very different light; and to see, in the once raw and undisciplined girl, a dignity, a power, and a skill in self-mastery, which he would least have expected to find in her character, perhaps of all others. He had observed her, too, on the evening at Sir James Crawford's; and ever since that time, his conduct and feelings had undergone a perceptible change. It is something to feel assured that those with whom we are intimately connected, are incapable of letting themselves down; that in every emergency they have the tact to adapt themselves to circumstances, so as to maintain a dignified and honourable place; and beyond this, that they have the penetration and good sense to know exactly how far to go, on what foundation they may tread with safety, and where their knowledge or ability will enable them to take a part without disgrace to themselves or their connexions.

All this agreeable kind of assurance Mr. Dalrymple was already beginning to feel in relation to his daughter; but beyond this he had never dreamed of aspiring; until a hint, conveyed by Lady Crawford, that the girl had capabilities for distinction, set his more ambitious thoughts in action, to ponder in secret upon what might be the most probable means of drawing her advantageously from her present



position of obscurity, and allowing her the advantage of greater knowledge of the world.

Patronising ladies are generally not slow to presume upon any small obligation incurred by those whom they would serve ; and a very little intimacy of a business character is sometimes thought sufficient to warrant a vast amount of familiarity towards an inferior. Prompted by the utmost kindness and goodwill, this amiable lady, therefore, was troubled with no hesitation or embarrassment in opening at once, in her usually frank and easy manner, upon the subject of Dorothy's various disadvantages, and the difficulty under which she laboured of really doing justice to herself.

"I can tell you exactly what she requires," said she, tapping the shoulder of Mr. Dalrymple with her fan, as he bent over a plan which he was examining with Sir James ; and, perfectly conscious of the favour implied by this familiarity, the engineer looked round, and begged, in his most courteous manner, that her ladyship would suggest whatever she thought desirable, assuring her that he should only be too happy to take advantage of her valuable advice.

"In the first place, then," said Lady Crawford, "Miss Dalrymple requires a different kind of servant."

Mr. Dalrymple started. This was the last thing he would have thought of—perhaps the last thing he would have wished to think of ; but he suddenly recovered himself, and begged her ladyship would go on.

"At present," said she, "I will say no more, for so much is comprehended in this item, that I have no doubt, you will find it supply a thousand deficiencies. Indeed, I should call it absolutely indispensable to that fine girl, who must really be introduced ; and at present, you see, one absolutely cannot call upon her."

Mr. Dalrymple felt his colour rising, and a slight impulse to say—"then you can let it alone," just tingled on his tongue; but he had not served the world and his own interests in it so long, without being able to master himself on an occasion like this. And after all, the good lady was right; for, if he wished either for himself or his daughter, to take a more exalted place in society, something must certainly be done at home as well as abroad. Consequently, notwithstanding this offence to a natural pride, which had been nearly half a century under subjection, though never quite subdued, Mr. Dalrymple was in a better state of preparation on his return home that day than he had ever been before, to listen to the account his daughter gave of a most valuable servant out of a situation, whom she should be more than happy to be the means of recommending to a comfortable home.

"What do you think of *our* home?" inquired Mr. Dalrymple, with a very questionable expression on his face; for, to tell the truth, it went sorely against his habitual feelings to admit the bare idea of increasing the number of his household.

Dorothy looked extremely puzzled by this suggestion of her father, as much so as if a strange and startling dream had been about to be realized; but she spoke her mind nevertheless, and even launched out into an eloquent description of her own difficulties with old Bridget; and especially described the strange encounter between her and the footman from Waverton, when her own sprained ankle was the subject of inquiry.

Mr. Dalrymple looked more annoyed than amused at his daughter's story. Perhaps he felt a little too seriously the perilous foundation upon which they stood while creeping onwards, each in their different way, towards a

favourite object ; and this very circumstance, so simple and childish in itself, seemed to convince him, still further than before, of the real necessity there was for the change in their establishment which Lady Crawford had proposed.

“ I wonder what wages this woman would require ? ” was his first and very natural observation ; and Dorothy considered it so hopeful, she went on to assure her father, that remuneration was not a subject of primary consideration in the present case.

Mr. Dalrymple was as much versed as most men in dealing with cases in which remuneration was not a point to be insisted upon ; and yet, such was his opinion of servants in general, and especially such as had been accustomed to live in gentlemen’s families, that the very sound of remuneration not being an object, gave him a serious misgiving as to the desirableness of such an arrangement as that under consideration. But still Dorothy had strong evidence to bring forward on her part ; so that at last a half consent was yielded on her father’s, and her own exulting hopes arose accordingly.

“ But what upon earth is to be done with old Bridget ? ” said she to herself, as soon as her father had left the room. “ I have, indeed, brought a storm upon my own head. Whatever I gain, I find I must pay dearly for it. First my sprained ankle costs me a train of never-ending falsehoods, for I must still feel the sprain whenever dancing is proposed ; and now I must wound the feelings of this poor old friend, perhaps as faithful in her way as the rival whom I am so anxious to introduce.”

Had Dorothy been less intent upon gaining her object, the difficulty presented by this last consideration might have proved insuperable ; but her character was not one



of those easily baffled by obstacles, nor diverted from its purposes by a trifling pain, when set against the obtaining of what appeared likely to be an important good. By persevering effort and skilful management, this great object was at last secured, and despite the many tears of old Bridget, and the many threats she uttered, of leaving a service in which her strength had been worn out, to beg her bread upon the king's highway at last, the introduction of Betsy Burton into the family was finally effected, without the walls of the house actually falling about their ears, as Bridget had appeared at one time to anticipate. What took place between the two domestics in their own department, or what convulsions shook the little sleeping-room to which they were condemned, Dorothy never knew; for she wisely abstained from seeing or hearing more than was absolutely necessary of the strife or the jealousy existing there.

Upon Betsy Burton, too, perhaps one half of what poor Bridget felt was lost, as well as upon her mistress; for, as she philosophically observed, in acknowledgment of some of the bitterest and most unmistakable hints and inuendoes of her fellow-servant, "She had other fish to fry, without making words with an old witch of a body like that."

Betsy was indeed occupied, both in head and heart, with one idea, and one feeling of absorbing interest—the justification of her brother's character, and his liberation from a distressing and humiliating confinement, which she declared, with much reason, would in a short time bring him to the grave. And then, as for the wife and children, they must go to their parish for anything that she knew. She never could tell, not she, what right those who got married had to expect that other people should maintain them.



But independently of Betsy's somewhat exaggerated views of the iniquity of perverted justice carried on under the sanction of pretended equal laws; notwithstanding her natural warmth of feeling, and vehemence of expression, the case of her brother James was becoming a very serious one, in the opinion of more indifferent parties than herself. On a full investigation being entered into, of the circumstances under which he was found, his own account of the affair altogether, with the unlikely nature of any of the motives which he had to bring forward for entering the garden, and lingering about the place, all wore so suspicious and questionable a character, that every attempt he made to extricate himself from the charge of participation in the murder, only seemed to plunge the unhappy man still deeper into the mass of condemning evidence in which he was involved.

As not unfrequently happens in such cases, the very simplicity of this simple man told very much against him. It seemed impossible for the wise and the knowing ones, who sate upon his case, to believe in anything so objectless and aimless as his loitering about that garden at such a time without a motive; and the very fact of his having no motive at all, appeared to them sufficient ground for supposing him to have had the worst. It is true, there remained some doubt as to whether the death had been caused by an act of murderous intent or not; and there was one circumstance of still greater weight in James Burton's favour even than that. It was, that no money was found upon his person, nor any proof that his intent had been to rob, as well as to cause the death of the old man. But when James, with his accustomed simplicity, allowed himself to be drawn out into a confession of what were his habitual feelings on passing by the premises of

the reputed miser, a theme on which he was particularly fond, at all times, of expatiating ; although his sister Betsy who was in court during the trial, interrupted the proceedings at this particular stage by her loud hems and coughings, by scrapings of her foot, and other signs that he had better not commit himself there, he went on with his accustomed fluency, as if he never could say too much on this, the most important feature of the fate which he believed to be upon him. Believing in his inmost soul that he was most effectually serving his own cause by this means, and in fact, making out so good a case as to astonish even the lawyers, the counsel, and judge themselves, until they looked knowingly at one another, and shook their wigs, and then went briskly on again, as if they had got hold of exactly the right clue—while observing all this, and feeling it rush, warm and tingling through his very nerves, the poor bewildered man stood there, talking and telling to his heart's content, and never doubting but he should soon be honourably dismissed, and so remain for life a monument of the justice and the wisdom of his country's laws ; a process was going on respecting the result of which, he felt not the slightest shadow of apprehension or uneasiness, but looked like one amazed at the clear shining of his own innocence, reflected upon the faces of the whole assembled court.

Little, however, as James Burton understood of the legal part of the proceedings, there was one chapter which he read and read again with more of painful apprehension. It was the agonised expression of his sister's face. Accustomed as he always had been to lean upon her as the very prop of his existence, no less than the guide to direct him in everything he ought to do, he could not understand why this expression lingered on

her face, and even deepened as the trial proceeded, only giving place sometimes to one of indignation and excitement almost beyond the power of her controul. "The men of law," thought James, "look pleased enough: what can the woman mean?" And still, despite the favourable impression which he believed himself to have been making, so strong was his habitual subserviency to Betsy's influence, so perfect, too, his almost constitutional reliance upon her sagacity, superior knowledge, and, above all, and in spite of her harsh sayings and strange doings, her never-failing truth and faithfulness towards himself, that he looked again and yet again towards the place where Betsy stood, intent upon reading aright this page of his history, still believing it to be more truthful than anything which he could read elsewhere.

Perhaps it was well for him that there was one signal of distress to be seen in his otherwise bright horizon. Perhaps it was well for him that, struck with his sister's eloquent looks and gestures, and her touching ejaculation, when, once thrown off her guard, she exclaimed, with clasped hands—"They will murder thee, poor innocent, after all!"—the crowd had gathered round her, and caught something of the impress of her gloomy fears. Perhaps it was well that a sensation of horror and distress was marked upon other countenances besides hers, for few could believe the man really guilty of such a crime. Perhaps it was well for the utterance of the final sentence, that a strange chill had already begun to creep around his heart, or it might otherwise have come with too terrible a blow for nature to sustain, had it fallen upon him at the height of his confidence and exultation.

As it was, the awful words were pronounced with an emphasis and solemnity which his stunned senses were in-



capable of feeling to their full extent. Before the real meaning of that tremendous sentence could have reached his ear, he had fallen, apparently lifeless, on the ground, first casting one look of blank and childlike innocence up to the face of the judge.

"I knew how it would end," cried Betsy, wringing her hands—"I knew from the first they would murder him. If ever there was a cruel murder done on earth, this is one!"

Miss Dalrymple, who had been present during the whole of this scene, under the protection of Mrs. Norris, now became so excited on behalf of the poor Burtons, that it was deemed best to remove her from the court; and as Betsy had now nothing left to do but to bewail her brother's cruel fate, she willingly consented to make one of the party home.

It was scarcely correct, however, to say that Betsy had nothing left to do. "While there's life there's hope," was one of her favourite maxims; and no sooner had she again set foot within Mr. Dalrymple's door, than her busy mind was taxed with inventions, schemes, and plans, for the rescue of her brother from what every one told her was an inevitable doom.

Ignorant as Dorothy was, both of the intricacies of the law, and of the rules which regulated these public matters, it was quite impossible for her to assist her afflicted servant, except with her sympathy, and with the eloquence she was capable of using, whenever there was a subject to be spoken of peculiarly adapted to the power of her mind, or the play of her fancy.

"That young mistress of yours has a tongue in her head worth all their special pleading," said Betsy to her fellow-servant, one day, during a long call from Mrs. Norris,



when Dorothy took occasion to lay before her friend her own extreme desire to visit the poor suffering man in his prison-cell.

“ You have found that out, have you ? ” was the response of old Bridget, accompanied by a tone of voice which implied the meanest possible opinion of her fellow-servant’s capacity. And here the conversation, which seldom extended much further, ended for the present, Betsy esteeming her companion altogether too contemptible either to be “ taken up ” or “ set down,” and being, moreover, so anxious to hear all that was going on in the parlour, that she made many errands to a little cupboard situated near the fireplace, where, however, there was no great store either of plate or other treasures, to require much looking after.

It was impossible for Betsy not to listen to the pleasing information thus caught, that the lady now calling had a very influential husband on the most intimate terms with the sheriff of the county, and that he was himself first cousin to a magistrate of the neighbouring town in which the county prison was situated, and, moreover, his school-fellow—Betsy wondered what that had to do with the matter—but the lady inclining her wise head on one side, and then on the other, with a knowing little nod at each inclination, which set in tremulous motion a vast array of sparkling ringlets and tiny little flowers, summed up so many advantages, connected with her own family and position, in favour of this “ most interesting case,” as she was pleased to call it, that the confident and cheering manner in which she spoke communicated itself to the sister’s heart, without her knowing exactly what were the real grounds of such agreeable and unexpected sensations.

The purport of the conversation, however, soon deve-

loped itself. A plan was being formed for Dorothy to accompany poor Betsy to the cell of the condemned; and had this object been to convey the message of mercy and pardon, it could not have been taken up more warmly by her friend, Mrs. Norris—it could not have been more talked about amongst the circle of her acquaintance, nor expatiated upon with greater interest and admiration, as the very perfection of female disinterestedness, benevolence, and noble devotedness of heart. All that could have been said, had Dorothy wished to suffer on the scaffold herself, instead of this poor man, came in time to be said by her friend, and by her friend's friends on this occasion, until the mere fancy of an enthusiastic and daring girl to penetrate into the interior of a prison, and look upon misery which she had no means of alleviating, was construed into the most heroic and praiseworthy enterprise which had ever been undertaken in the memory of the inhabitants of M——. In short, Mrs. Norris regarded it as a very *effective kind of thing*, and she fluttered it about accordingly.

It is true the manner and the conversation of the different parties who took the subject up, were not much in accordance with Dorothy's taste, but what could she do? She had an object to attain upon which her heart, or rather her inclination, was set; and how was this to be accomplished, without the instrumentality of her kind and influential friends? Beside which, though she did not like their style of talking, she had no objection in the world that the thing should be talked about; and accordingly, when all the arrangements were finally concluded, and Dorothy had permission from high authorities to accompany the sister of the criminal to his prison-cell, she dressed herself for the occasion with as much care and as much

effect, as if she had been preparing for a morning call on some distinguished character.

But still the simplicity of the girl's heart was not quite gone, nor the force of her natural feelings quite extinguished. She could dress herself beforehand with strict reference to the eyes which might be upon her as she went, and the contrast between her own person and the dark walls and darker scenes of that dismal prison ; but no sooner did she find herself there, than every trace of the feelings with which she set out was gone—every thought and recollection of herself absorbed in the strong impressions produced by the realities around her. Her nature was not that of a coward, nor her constitution of the character which is generally called nervous ; but she grasped the arm of her servant with an unusual pressure, as they moved along the galleries, and passed the grated doors, and heard the clinking chains and rattling keys—all which were sights and sounds peculiarly adapted to strike the attention of one to whom human life was all a scene—a drama—a stage to be performed upon, or a play to be enacted, rather than a reality to be experienced.

But while the mind of this strange and inexperienced prison visitor was solely occupied with surrounding things, that of her companion had but one object—to impress upon every one her own conviction of her brother's innocence, nor of his innocence only, but his utter incapacity to do the act imputed to him ; and she was not sorry to bring with her a witness, though so young and inexperienced, who she believed would testify boldly to the fact, after having once looked upon the harmless person of her brother.

It would, indeed, have been scarcely possible to find a human being whose countenance and general appearance



bore less the impress of a murderer than those of James Burton. Simple-hearted, weak, and pliant, though very vain, and in his own strange way always aspiring, incapable of harshness, and tender to a fault, he looked the very personification of what his sister described him—"a man who had not the heart to kill a mouse." Indeed, so strong had been the general impression in favour of his innocence, that notwithstanding the condemning evidence, an order had already gone forth for the suspension of his doom; from which circumstance all but his sister augured favourably for the future. She, having once made up her mind that there was injustice in the law, malignity in the counsel, and spite in the judge, and having believed from the first that her brother would be a victim to the concentrated cruelty of the whole assembled court, had no more hope of his escape, than she had of the bird in the hands of the fowler.

With the poor sufferer, also, all hope was now extinct. He had lived upon hope, not upon reality, for the whole of his previous life; and now, with that foundation utterly destroyed, his mind was indeed a miserable wreck, floating on a sea of horrors. Reason he could not. He had perhaps never reasoned in his life, and this was not a time to call up unaccustomed powers of thought. To feel, was all he seemed capable of, and that in so confused a manner, that his nights and days were converted into something like a terrible dream of chains, and bolts, and gibbets, and skeletons of dead men swinging in the air, and grinning faces like a sea of hate and scorn surging around him; and even if he slept, he woke again starting, and listening to the sound of that deep sentence ringing ever in his ear: or sometimes the cry of a weak starving child seemed in his prison bed beside him; and that, he told his sister, was



the worst thing to endure of all. Beyond this he had but few words to say to her, except—"I never did that murder, Betsy—never—never!" and then he would crouch down again, with his head almost between his knees, and so would moan and rock himself for hours together.

It needed not the force of the sister's earnest pleading in his favour now, to convince her young companion that if James Burton should die the death of a murderer, he would suffer unjustly. Dorothy had previously been sufficiently convinced of this, but she had never felt the *reality* of his situation until this moment. It was the first time in her life that she had ever been brought into such close contact and acquaintance with absolute wretchedness; and for one blessed moment she realised the emptiness and insignificance of all that she herself was living for. Alas! that moment was very short. The tears which trickled down her cheeks within the prison-walls were soon dried away by the stirring air of the street into which she suddenly emerged; and the weight which lay upon her heart was soon dispersed by the flutter and *éclat* which her re-appearance in the world excited.

## CHAPTER XXV.



AMONGST other, and perhaps more interesting persons in this history, we must not forget Kate Staunton—the calculating, rational, energetic orphan girl—who cared for herself upon the reasonable principle that she had nobody to care for her; and we return to this portion of our history the more willingly, that Kate was left, some time ago, under the enjoyment of a new, and unquestionably great pleasure, yet one that could only be indulged in by a breach of the strict but wholesome rules of conventional propriety. Far be it, then, from the readers of this story to suppose that Kate was one who could long remain happy in the indulgence of a gratification of this nature. Like other human beings—perhaps especially like those of her own sex and age—Kate was apt to look with an approving eye upon what was very pleasant to herself, and hence she had endeavoured in a thousand ways to justify her early morning walks with Arthur Hamilton. Most certainly, too, their conversation and their feelings towards each other were not of a nature to stamp such interviews with any character of impropriety, for seldom had a more simple boy and girl attachment arisen in any youthful minds, accompa-

nied at the same time by that frank and unsophisticated manner, which revealed at once to each what was in the heart of the other.

From this very frankness, and the perfect candour which existed between them, Kate went trusting on, never dreaming that she should ever have a cloud upon her path, from circumstances so foreign to her thoughts, as mutual misunderstandings. Trials and perplexities she was, indeed, prepared for ; and she saw, or fancied she saw, that Arthur Hamilton had not the best possible idea of making his way in the world. But then she could help him ; and what a pleasant thought was this to one who felt within herself a certain secret power of mastering difficulties, and making the most of means and opportunities. So Kate went on with her engagements and her prospects, very pleasantly to herself, only that once she had been a little startled, when having playfully suggested that her lover should be more attentive to his employment as a duty, if he could not feel it to be a pleasure, a cloud had come over his countenance, and an impatient expression had escaped from his lips, which for many after days and nights she wished she had not seen or heard.

But a greater trial than this was now to come, and Kate was yet to prove, whether, in preparing herself for the actual business of life, she was also preparing for its perplexities, its straits, its difficulties, and disappointments. Of these, too, there are in woman's lot some of so delicate a nature, so indefinable in their exact outline and precise nature ; above all, so dependent upon circumstances and consequences, that the nicest calculation appears to be required, in order to meet them with that principle, firmness, and self-possession, which are essential elements of the highest female character.

Amongst these perplexities there are none which call forth more conflicting feeling, than where the requirements of society appear to claim pre-eminence above generous self-devotion, or noble purpose. Especially does it look captivating to the young to dare the world's censure for the sake of serving, or even of pleasing, one who is tenderly beloved ; and to shrink back, in this and many other cases, saying—"I will not do it, because I shall be blamed by the world,"—what a poor and contemptible plea does this sound in the ear of warm-hearted, enthusiastic, inexperienced youth !

Of course, these remarks apply only to cases in which the act itself is not morally wrong, as in the instance of those early morning walks in which Kate Staunton had been so happy ; and yet a strong conviction came upon her that these pleasant walks must be discontinued. Cold, reasoning Kate ! And yet she was not cold either. She would have walked over burning coals, rather than lose the affection of her lover ; but she must do right, whatever might be the consequence. That necessity was laid upon her, and it admitted not of a moment's doubt that these walks must be given up, until the intimacy itself should be further sanctioned, or should have grown to a more probable result.

"Suppose, for instance," said Kate, in arguing the subject with Arthur, "that my five cousins had each a lover, and each went out early in the morning their separate ways—what kind of character would the family have altogether?"

"Let them be tried," replied Arthur, with some asperity.

"Even then," said Kate, "their rule would be no guide for me."



“No; the world is your guide, Kate, and you care more for what can be said by a little coterie of spiteful spinsters around a winter’s fire, than you will ever care for me. That I can see, plainly enough. I only regret that I did not see it before—that I fancied you, in my blind and stupid dreams, to be something above the world, untouched, uncontaminated by its falsehood and pretension. I thought you were a true, noble-hearted girl, Kate, and that when you promised to love me, it would be through good and through evil, through joy and through sorrow, to the world’s end. I thought you would walk beside me, like my good angel, wherever I went; that nothing in this life was ever to separate us—that, friendless and alone, we two were to be everything to each other, and——”

“What *has* come over you, Arthur, and in what have I failed?”

“Failed! Why, the first time there comes a question of propriety—of the merest conventional propriety, not of strictly speaking right and wrong—the first time you begin to suspect that man’s blame or woman’s spite can breathe upon you, though you have neither father nor mother, nor any human being for whom you are bound to care—yet the first time you think there is the remotest possibility that your good name may be injured, I am just nothing to you, a mere feather in the balance, when weighed against the approbation of this wonderfully correct and rightly judging world.”

“You forget, Arthur, that a young woman must be very scrupulous in maintaining the dignity of her name, and the purity of her character.”

“Yes, where there is anything really to touch either, I fully agree with you; and I would go to the greatest

extreme with you, in this respect, that any old prude could desire."

"Well, then, dear Arthur, don't you think it would have been better, just a very little better, if on your part you had thought about these walks for me; and seeing, as you say, that I have neither father nor mother to take any thought about me, would it not have been better if you had thought a little for me what low people might say, what spiteful women and coarse men might say, about a girl who stole out of her uncle's house, before any of the family were up, to walk with a young gentleman alone. I don't wish to reproach you, Arthur, but I think it would have been kinder, if you, knowing the world better than I do, had thought of this for me."

"I will never make anything so unjust and contemptible as the opinion of the world the rule of *my* actions, whatever you may choose for yours. I hate the world, and, what is more, I despise it."

"But we are parts of the world ourselves, and must live in it. Besides which, there is another view to be taken of this case; and the only one that, in my opinion, is of any value."

"First tell me, what *is* the world? and of whom is it composed? Is yon cabbage man who meets you every morning to be the judge of your conduct? or the girl who carries milk? or even your aunt's waiting-woman? or your aunt herself? Remember, *I* bow to none of these authorities, whatever you may do."

"Be reasonable for a moment, Arthur, and I will explain to you what I mean."

"You are for ever reasoning. I hate a reasoning woman!"

"You must not hate me, Arthur, whatever I am."

“Why not?”

“Because it will kill me. I am not romantic, Arthur. I cannot express my feelings for you in poetry ; but I tell you once for all, that your love is of more value to me than all the world beside. I could have lived without it once—now I cannot ; yet I should be unworthy of this love if I did not at least try to reason, so far as to understand what is right and wrong, prudent and imprudent, honourable and disgraceful. Beyond this, I should be unworthy of your love, if I had not the firmness to abide by my conviction of what is right, let it cost me what it may to do so.”

“Kate Staunton, you are a stoic ; you are no true English woman. If you were a mother, you would murder your idiot child, and argue that you were doing an act of service to the human race ! You may keep your cold-blooded notions for the benefit of some happier man. For myself, I would rather marry a tigress, than such a woman as you.”

In spite of herself, and the real agony she was enduring, Kate could not refrain from smiling at the terrific grandeur of her lover's eloquence ; but it was a very bitter smile which sat upon her lip, and soon gone ; for her companion actually turned away, and left her in his angry mood, without one word of soothing or of reconciliation.

Very sad and sick at heart was Kate, as she sat at the breakfast table with her aunt and cousins that day, though inwardly rejoicing, now more than ever, that her secret was closely locked within her own breast ; for she knew but too well how they would have triumphed, had they known the luckless termination of these—as they would have called them—“most imprudent and unwarrantable

interviews." Even Kate began to question, within herself, whether she was not already reaping the reward of a conscious deviation from what was strictly right. But no; her mind was too well balanced to yield to such a painful conclusion. She had not *persisted* in doing what she felt to be wrong. She had given it up; and she did not believe she should be punished so severely for yielding, but for a short time, to a temptation which led to nothing really criminal in itself.

"Perhaps my fault was not so much there," said Kate to herself, as soon as she regained the privacy of her own room, "as in mistaking the character of the man to whom I have bound myself so solemnly for life." And here, gentle reader, we have to confess that Kate Staunton reasoned again. Yes; contrary to all the rules of romance, and sentiment, and young-lady love, she reasoned long and deeply; and her conclusion was, that a mere fit of passion, distressing and dangerous as it might be, was only to be regarded like a tempest in the elements of nature—a proof of inharmonious qualities contending together, and requiring different direction and arrangement, so as to produce tranquillity and satisfaction amongst themselves; and if, amongst these jarring elements, there were qualities of real worth, and capabilities of virtue and happiness, the wild passions of her lover might be borne with as the storm is borne—not welcomed, but endured—prepared for before it comes, and made the best of when it has passed over, let the devastation which it leaves be what it may.

But if, on the other hand—for still Kate went on reasoning—her lover should entertain essentially different views of human life, and of personal duty, from her own; if he should be deliberately determined to make his own



inclination the rule of his life, leaving the consequences to fall where they would ; why then, there was but one alternative—she would not—could not, marry such a man, because it would be impossible to love him ; and without love, she would be more condemned in the fulfilment of a marriage contract, than in a broken vow.

Gentle reader, bear with Kate Staunton yet a little while. It may seem to you impossible that any one should love, and yet be capable of reasoning thus ; but watch her a little longer, and see whether, with her reference to reason and to conscience, she does not in reality do more honour to the feeling of love, in its high capabilities and sacred purity, and worth, than you are doing with all your blind devotion to a mere impulse. Remember, too, that without love, without esteem, no woman can discharge her duty as a wife ; and think of the wrong it is doing any man to marry him on such terms. Think too, what it must be to enter into this solemn and irrevocable union, in the sight of God and man, under the awful conviction, that with such a companion, it will be impossible to serve God, and to be happy ! It is not always the most generous and unselfish, who are the most opposed to reasoning as a habit ; and well would it be for thousands upon thousands of the human race, if there were more women in the world who reasoned like Kate Staunton.

It is true that Arthur Hamilton had used expressions, which no woman with even a moderate share of feeling could have borne, without extreme suffering ; but the more coolly Kate reflected upon them in the solitude of her own room, the more entirely she felt convinced that they had arisen out of nothing more than a momentary impulse ; and the more certain was her belief, that in his better moments, he would become convinced of his error,

and return to her again. Had it been possible to admit the idea that he had really felt what he said, and that this sudden outburst of passion was to separate them for ever, the tone of her reflections would have been very different ; for, dangerous and distressing as such a temper might be in the companion of her earthly lot, there was something in the thought of losing him, too dreadful to be contemplated.

“ Unless,” and she repeated the expression many times, as if to strengthen her resolution ; “ unless I should find him unworthy of my love ; and,” she added, in a tone not quite so firm and so decided, “ he must be very bad, indeed, for me to come to that conclusion.”

Notwithstanding all her reasoning, and all her clear conviction, Kate Staunton had too much of the true heart of a woman to remain perfectly satisfied, or at ease, without other evidence than her own belief that her lover would relent, and would seek the earliest opportunity of reconciliation ; she consequently hailed with feverish delight the appearance of his well-known writing, on a note which was hastily put into her hand by an express messenger, not more than two days after their first misunderstanding. The address on the cover of this note was unusually hurried and irregular, so much so as to occasion some alarm ; and yet, the fact of its being delivered in the presence of Mrs. Ashley and her daughters, rendered it very undesirable to pry into the contents until a more private opportunity ; for, as has already been stated, nothing transpired, or could transpire in relation to the poor cousin, without calling forth the most curious and searching investigation ; and the fact of a note being sent by an express messenger, was enough to set the Misses Ashley wondering and whispering for a whole month.

"You can read your letter, my love," said Mrs. Ashley, in her most inviting manner.

"Thank you," said Kate, "I am in no haste," and she slipped it into her pocket.

"I should have thought it required haste, by the manner of its coming," observed cousin Jane.

"Do you know what it is, dear?" asked Mrs. Ashley, unable longer to withhold a direct inquiry.

"Not at all," replied Kate.

"You know from whom it comes," continued the aunt, with a tone which implied a certain kind of right, on her part, to be made acquainted with the fact.

"By your leave, I will soon ascertain," replied Kate, and she hastened up-stairs to her own room.

Well was it that she did so. The letter had bad tidings, and Kate would infinitely rather pass through the first emotions which they awakened by herself, than in the midst of a family so little distinguished for their sympathy and loving-kindness as the Ashleys.

"My own dear and true-hearted Kate," the letter began; "we are all ruined together. Poor Arnold, his mother and sister, overwhelmed in distress too deep for me to describe. Old Lee—but I forget, he is your uncle—a villain, nevertheless, and off, nobody knows where, nor cares either, unless it be the hounds of justice; for, if found, he will undoubtedly be transported, if not hung, and even the latter fate is too good for him. Another view of the same picture presents the entire loss of all the Hamilton property, as well; all swallowed up by the greediness of this one man, and for what? For the mere passion of standing well in the business world, and looking as if he bought and sold to a greater extent than any one else. No other enjoyment had this wretched man in life. Enjoy-



ment! what a perversion of the word! It was a deadly fever that was upon him, eating away his vitals, and, worst of all, his heart; for he was cruel, as he was joyless, in this hunger and thirst after gold. But what am I writing to you?—to you, whom I ought to approach in sackcloth and ashes, the veriest penitent that ever crawled. No, Kate, you would not like to see me humbled, would you? not even to you? And yet, I suppose, I ought to be humble to every one now, seeing that I am a beggar. But, strange as it may seem, I actually feel prouder. I cannot describe to you the sensation; I seem positively to enjoy the romance of having my fortunes to *seek*, not to *make*—that I never shall enjoy. Only when I think of my poor father, there lies the horror. I absolutely dare not write to him, and have compelled Arnold, amidst all his weight of troubles, to discharge this duty for me. Arnold was born for duty; the noblest fellow that ever walked the earth: worthy of you, Kate, and the only man who is; but you shall not love him, neither, only as a cousin. You shall love the low-minded brute and madman who called you names, and cast your love away from him, at the very time when he needed it most, and when he ought to have treasured it in his bosom as the only jewel of his life. What is it that makes us so often do the very things which we hate ourselves for, and hate even in the doing? I have somewhere seen these words, and though they sound a little too romantic for me, I must quote them—‘We break the hearts we would die to heal, and hurry on towards the grave, those, whom to save, we would leap into the devouring flames.’

“Yes, Kate, you shall, you must love me, and I know you will—better, now that I am a ruined man, even than you did before. Indeed, I cannot do without you now; I have



nothing else in the wide world. You must stand by me now—be my good angel—help me, guide me, keep me from sinking. To cut the matter short for the present, you must meet me to-morrow morning for the last time for weeks, perhaps months, to come; for I must be gone from this place. My uncle's house is the only spot on earth where I can find a roof to shelter my head; and there I do not like to go, for even they have been let in, persuaded by my poor father to risk thousands, where he was risking all; happy for them it not more.

“And now, dearest Kate, I wait only your answer to decide whether I go to-day, or to-morrow. I cannot bring myself to doubt your willingness to meet me, because there are matters of grave import that we must talk over, and then each take our separate course. You see how serious I have become; it is with thinking about poor Arnold and his family, even more than my own troubles; and then, again, my father! that is my weak point. I cannot bear to picture him, nor can conjecture how he will endure the shock, nor what he will subsequently do. You must help me here, Kate, for I am weak as a child, but ever the same in my entire devotedness and love to the best and truest of all earthly friends.”

The answer, which Kate despatched without delay, was simply this, “Of course I will meet you; there is a sacred duty in our seeing each other again, under such circumstances—something very different from a mere indulgence—different indeed! for how many agonies must be compressed into that short interview! I wish for nothing so much as to be your sister now, that I might be always near you. I see you so desolate, without mother, sister, brother, friend, and I compelled to stand aloof and

scarcely recognise your name when I hear it spoken. Our noble Arnold and his mother, and their sweet Lucy ! don't think I can forget them, even in my anguish for you. Never doubt but I will be at the gate punctually at the old time. If it was right to love you, and I cannot think it wrong, it is right now, and for this once, to meet you thus, seeing we can meet in no other way. I am punctilious about pleasure, and I always will be, because that does not afford a sufficient reason for breaking an established rule, and especially a rule upon the observance of which hangs much of the good of society, for if young ladies generally went out in this manner, what would be the consequence ? I desire also, not to judge the actions of others by a stricter law than I would my own ; and as we should all blame a young servant for doing such a thing, why should a young lady, who has so many other indulgences, set so dangerous an example in this, for the mere selfish gratification of her own wishes ? As you see, however, that which forms a sufficient objection, where mere pleasure is the question, appears to me to be insufficient under circumstances like ours, and where the meeting must almost necessarily be the last. If you think me cold and calculating still, and certainly these lines read a little like it, try me with anything you desire to be done, or suffered for you in your absence—try me in any way you please, and so far as it is right to go, you will not find a more willing and devoted friend, than &c.”

Kate Staunton now found that she was entering upon the real experience of a woman's dubious lot. No longer a girl, except in the buoyancy of her own spirits and her necessary ignorance of the world, she had already to act as the guide and support of one older than her-

self in years, though considerably younger in strength of principle, and firmness of character. Beyond this, she found also, that she was entering upon that sphere of trial, to which belong some of the bitterest tears which it is woman's destiny to shed. She was beginning to feel the responsibility of having to act rightly, and to bear the blame of acting harshly, and rigidly, from purely selfish motives. Instead of being strengthened, supported, assisted, and guided aright herself, she was already called upon to resist the indulgence of her own feelings, fresh and warm and impetuous as they naturally were ; and to maintain her position like a rock in the midst of a troubled sea, unshaken and unyielding, even while listening to importunities which would have led her exactly in the direction it was most pleasant to her to go.

Nor is this a situation by any means uncommon, in the experience of those whose great object it is to do right ; who, much as they desire to please man, have an habitual and abiding preference for pleasing God ; and who would rather sacrifice the greatest personal enjoyment, even that of affording satisfaction to one who is most beloved, than yield to the temptation of doing, or leading others to do, what is absolutely wrong.

This is precisely the sphere of interest, watchfulness, effort, and self-sacrifice, in which woman is called to feel, to reason, to pray, and to act. And yet half the world goes on maintaining that woman, in her preparation for life, has no need for anything but obedience—the other half, that she has no need for anything but accomplishments ; or if a small, and more philosophical number from the latter class, are now beginning to think that learning should be added to her accomplishments, they see

no reason to doubt but that Latin, Greek, and Algebra, with a slight acquaintance with physical science, will enable her to fulfil all the duties of a wife and a mother; the equally onerous and honourable duties of a cheerful, contented, and useful old maid, being always gratuitously thrown into the calculation, as matters of course.

Leaving Kate Staunton to enjoy her last interview with Arthur Hamilton alone, and to talk with him as those converse who have matters of interest, profound as life and death to discuss, we must turn again to other scenes of mingled light and shadow, where, unfortunately, there is less of earnestness to uphold the right, and less of firmness to resist the wrong.



## CHAPTER XXVI.



F Dorothy Dalrymple had been surprised out of her accustomed self-possession, by the novelty of the scene she witnessed in that gloomy prison, and the hopeless suffering of one, who, until that calamity fell upon him, had never known what it was to be bereft of hope ; she was perhaps, not less surprised at the *éclat* which her visit to the cell of the condemned had subsequently excited, in the town of M——.

Mrs. Norris was an excellent reporter of all those facts and circumstances, whether real or imaginary, which go to make up a scene ; and she had not been sparing of these whenever she could find a listener, or a group of listeners, suited to her purpose. To have an extraordinary friend, was to Mrs. Norris, the next good thing to being extraordinary herself ; in some respects it was even preferable, because it afforded wider scope for her eloquence, inasmuch, as we may say, with some show of plausibility, a great deal more in praise of a friend, than in praise of one's-self ; at the same time that the substance of the matter communicated tends the same way, and adds agree-

ably to the same account. Thus it was wonderfully gratifying to hear how Mrs. Norris would expatiate upon the scene in the prison, not having been there herself—how she would tell of the agony of the wretched man—the picturesque effect of his criminal's costume—the clanking of his chains, the light from the prison window falling on his head which rested between his pale and emaciated hands; and then the earnest pleading of his eloquent and noble hearted sister, the most faithful and devoted of all existing women—quite a picture too, in her deep grief; always throwing herself into expressive attitudes, which an artist would be delighted to catch, and any one of which would be the making of a young sculptor.

But if Mrs. Norris was eloquent while the brother and the sister alone were her theme, it was, indeed, a rich treat to hear her commence upon Dorothy. Always devoted to her friends, and especially if they were in any way distinguished, this amiable lady knew not what bounds to lay out for herself, when speaking of the noble and disinterested benevolence of a young lady who could actually place herself within the precincts of a prison—who could endure all the shock, and jar, and horror of those frightful associations which must throng around her in such a place, above and beyond the real spectacles of guilt and misery to which she must be exposed—could brave all this, traversing the dark passages, and not certain that some gloomy cell would not close upon herself; and all for the generous purpose of administering consolation to a wretched criminal condemned to suffer the severest penalty of the law.

Mrs. Norris had seen the dress, too, which Dorothy wore that morning, and could assure her friends that it

was impossible for anything to be more graceful or more becoming. A black satin mantilla, with a deep fall of black lace, was above all things calculated to harmonise with the scene; and her own raven hair braided in deep rich bands, and parted, as then worn, entirely from the forehead, gave a peculiarly benevolent character to her face; while her tall figure, standing just within the deep shadow of the heavy walls, stooping her head forward, as her custom was whenever she was particularly intent upon anything, gave her exactly the appearance of a ministering spirit, sent there on an embassy of love and mercy.

Perhaps it was well for Dorothy, and for her friendship for Mrs. Norris, that she never heard more than occasionally a small portion of these details; and when she did so, it was always to put a stop to the narration as quickly as possible; but even the grace and delicacy with which she did this, gave rise to a fresh burst of admiration on the part of her friend, followed up by whispered eulogiums which told more favourably than the loudest praise.

Nor was there any want of listeners to these details. If, in the world of business there were already shrewd suspicions that Mr. Dalrymple was a rising man; in the social world there were suspicions no less shrewd that his daughter, notwithstanding all her disadvantages, had about her an air of distinction that would be sure to work its way in an equally successful, though a different manner. Mrs. Norris had quickness enough to see that this idea was gaining ground, that her young friend was becoming popular; and charmed with her share of the distinction of having introduced and brought her into notice, she made the most of all her striking qualities, by placing them before her guests, with every possible advantage from the most favourable lights.

Had Dorothy been one of themselves, a fraction of the little circle from which these guests were selected, it is more than probable she would have met with a greater number to question her pretensions, than to follow Mrs. Norris in her enthusiastic admiration. But a perfect stranger, as she had hitherto been, was more easily admitted to distinction ; and bursting upon them as she did at once, without any previous struggle for pre-eminence, Dorothy found every day that her admirers in this circle were increasing in number and importance ; the men because she really amused, and often set them at defiance ; the women, not unfrequently, because it was pleasanter to admire a stranger, than their neighbours nearer home.

But it was not with the circle of the Norrises alone that Dorothy was becoming popular. Besides the welcome and valuable addition of a more efficient servant, Mr. Dalrymple had actually extended his liberality so far as to allow of an entire reform in his daughter's wardrobe, which, with the assistance of the spinster aunt, and the ingenuity of Betsy Burton, was effected without any very alarming or ruinous expenditure of money. There is often a good deal of self-possession derived from the consciousness of being well-dressed—not *over*-dressed, for that is, perhaps, as embarrassing as the opposite extreme ; but in being dressed like other people, and in a manner which entitles the wearer to respect in the eyes of those who have no higher criterion for their judgment of character. Supported by this consciousness, but still more so by her quick and clear perception of the generally favourable impression she was making, Dorothy was now enabled really to feel that composure which at first was only assumed, even in the more select society at Waverton.

Lady Crawford was amongst those who were most de-



lighted with this improvement in the person and manners of her young *protégée*. She had always wished to introduce the girl ; and she did not mind poverty when unaccompanied by vulgarity. It rather afforded her advantages in the way of exercising that kind and patronising care which she was so fond of extending over her humbler friends ; but there certainly had been a degree of rawness, or unpreparedness, about that friendless girl, beyond what she was accustomed to associate herself with ; and she trusted to her own prudent hints to the father, as well as to the under-training of Mrs. Norris, to make her a little more presentable, before conferring upon her the honour of being invited to a longer visit at Waverton.

That favoured time, however, appeared now to have come ; and having heard from Mrs. Norris most favourable accounts of the aunt, as well as the niece, Lady Crawford extended her invitation to both, not forgetting that Betsy Burton was a most important addition to the machinery of the visit, as conducted behind the scenes.

Nothing could be more gracious, friendly, or condescending than her ladyship's manners during the whole of this visit. She was really delighted with aunt Anne, as being a gentlewoman herself, and acquainted with the habits of good families, though upon what terms this acquaintance had been formed, was never very clearly explained. It is needless to say that aunt Anne was delighted, too ; and peeped about, and made her observations upon Waverton, preparatory to subsequent descriptions, which might serve as a passport to other circles of society ; although, as she often observed to her niece, when they were alone, " The establishment at Waverton was nothing in comparison with Dalgeny Castle."

" Perhaps not," observed Dorothy on one occasion, " but

you are a guest here, and that is something in advance of being a governess there."

Had this, and other observations of a similar nature, from the same lips, been overheard about this time by a critical observer of human nature, they would have been clearly understood as indicating a very considerable advance towards a certain state of feeling, by no means uncommon in the world. In fact, there was an onward movement perceptible in the mind of this hitherto unsophisticated girl, and that along such rapid stages, that to look back, only for the space of a few weeks, seemed almost to lose a sense of her identity. Whether she was really happy in this change, perhaps she never paused to ask. One thing was certain,—she was eager and in earnest in this onward course, and she was gaining ground: so far she was happy; but had she applied to her heart the simple question, *what* she was pursuing, the answer might have been both a sad and a serious one.

Just now, it would have been the last thing likely to be thought of. Each night, when she retired to rest, so late and weary, there were too many important items of dress and general arrangement to be talked over with her aunt and Betsy; and each morning, when she awoke, there were too many pleasant calculations to be made about the business or the pleasure of the day.

Never, until now, had Dorothy known the luxury of being really located in a handsome dwelling, of being surrounded by a well appointed establishment, of treading on rich carpets from morning till night, and of looking upon beautiful objects wherever she directed her gaze. With the eye of an untaught artist, she was quick to catch the agreeable impression produced by every work of taste, and the rich paintings, vases, sculpture, drapery, every-

thing, in short, upon which her gaze could rest, all combined to form around her a scene of enchantment, too vivid and too charming to be contemplated with equanimity of mind."

"Oh, aunt!" said she one night, on returning to their dressing room, "do you think I shall ever be rich, and surrounded by beautiful things?"

"If you marry well," replied the spinster.

Of course Dorothy laughed, as young ladies always do on such occasions, though nothing could be graver than the cold calculating look and manner of the speaker, nothing graver than the subject spoken of.

"Is there no other way, do you think?" asked Dorothy; "I have no fancy for being married yet, at any rate. Don't you think my father will be rich some time? He seems to be getting on wonderfully. All day Sir James and he are busy with this affair of the embankment, and Betsy tells me it will be a very profitable thing."

"If you think," replied the aunt, "that your father's getting on will ever surround you with beautiful things, I can tell you, nothing could be more unlikely or absurd. Your father's taste is not so much for wealth, as for distinction, and still less for the luxuries which wealth alone can procure. He would be perfectly satisfied that you and I should be buried in that dark parlour for life, provided only he could stand well in his profession, and be a man of consequence in the world."

"I believe you are right," sighed Dorothy, "and for a few minutes she appeared very thoughtful; but suddenly recovering her most mischievous look, she fixed her large eyes upon the spinster, and said, "Suppose *you* marry well, aunt Anne, and let me live with you."

Aunt Anne tossed her head, of course, as ladies not very

young are apt to do on such occasions, and murmured something, not very intelligible, about the splendid chances she had had, her niece wondering all the while what the frustrating circumstances had been; and it is quite possible that this wonder on her part might have grown into words, had not Betsy Burton had occasion to enter the room, when, detecting with her quick ear, the subject of their conversation, by the few sounds still dying away, there followed such an outburst against matrimony in the abstract, and such branching forth into particular cases, with details of drunken, brutish husbands—children beyond count—idiots, lame, and blind—failures—jealousies—racks and tortures of every description, that the maiden aunt was both edified and comforted that night, and retired to rest believing she had enjoyed, in her own person, a merciful deliverance from all beaux, offers, marriage contracts, and whatsoever of that nature might have endangered her peace of mind, and curtailed her liberty for life.

It has been stated in a previous chapter, that Dorothy Dalrymple had not then entered upon that system of flirtation which, if one may judge from the aspect of society generally, forms no inconsiderable portion of the business of idle life. We are afraid, however, it must now be confessed, that certain symptoms were beginning to manifest themselves, of Dorothy being, in this respect, no wiser than the rest of her sex. Not that there could, at this time, be proved against her anything like design in what she did, beyond the mere drawing around her a group of gentlemen, and keeping them there, enchained by the fascination of her large and splendid eyes—sometimes by her humour, sometimes by her pathos—for she could now look down, while telling a pathetic story, and droop her head, and let her voice fall into a lower key,



and dwell upon the touching parts, with something so like tenderness, it would have required a very skilful judge to say whether that tenderness was real. Purely affected, or assumed for the occasion, it certainly was not ; but as the best acting on the stage is that in which the heart goes along with the emotions represented, so there is a species of acting in private life, in which the truth is not absolutely violated, although its outward manifestation is purposely and gracefully put on.

Had Dorothy been altogether an unreal character, she would have been infinitely less charming than she was. No ; it was real pity which filled her heart when she visited the cell of the condemned. It was real indignation which fired her eye, and animated her form, when she spoke of the injustice of his condemnation. It was no pretended cheerfulness when she looked pleased, nor a made laugh that lighted up her face, while it touched, with its musical vibrations, even the dullest ear, and awoke the glad sympathy of joy in others, far, far beyond what ever was called forth by mimic or unreal mirth. Thus far there was very little absolute pretence or falsehood in anything she said or did. She had commenced her popular career, hating all falsehood, and despising affectation from her heart ; but if a distinguished position in society required of her that she must speak falsehoods, as well as act them, and that she must affect what she did not really feel, she was yet a stranger to any principle likely to be strong enough to support her in the hour of temptation, so far as to make the lower motive give place to the higher. Let us hope, however, that the world is not so requiring as to demand such a sacrifice as that.

It may easily be supposed, that in the drawing-room at Waverton, there was no want of those graceful and agree-

able loungers usually found in sufficient numbers, wherever there is beauty to be admired, gossip to be talked, or—pardon the suggestion—an excellent luncheon to be partaken of. During the time of Dorothy's visit, these graceful assemblages were more numerous than usual; and amongst the gentlemen in particular, the centre of attraction was always the dark-haired girl, with white teeth, and brilliant eyes, who looked and spoke more thoughts worth thinking in one hour, than many more beautiful ladies in the whole course of their lives.

Amontst this set of loungers were some who appeared anxious to be considered Dorothy's devoted admirers; and one in particular, whose graceful figure was not unfrequently seen at her feet, reclining in such a manner as best to bring into notice, at one and the same time, his entire devotion to beauty and talent, and the elegant turn of his own well-formed limbs. It so happened, that this gentleman was the same who had accompanied Dorothy in her performance of the charades; and if the disclosure of his name will at all increase the interest of the reader, it was Frederick Ashley himself, as handsome, as gay as ever; and as entirely disengaged in heart and hand as if he had never met, beneath the shadow of an old spreading tree, a fair young girl, who had loved him from her childhood with the absorbing enthusiasm of a simple, trusting, and devoted heart.

Yes, it was Frederick Ashley who now fluttered about this newly-discovered votary of distinction, intent upon nothing so much as claiming the first place in her regard; and, indifferent as Dorothy had once been to the commonplace of his habitual conversation, she began already to find it very convenient to have one professed admirer, whose untiring gallantry she might always fall back upon,

in case of failure elsewhere. Thus the attentions of that graceful gentleman became very useful to her in a peculiar manner—perhaps the last way in which he would have calculated upon being valued ; but like many others, he was happily quite ignorant of the nature of his position ; and thus fluttered on to his heart's content, believing every pleasant thing he said or did was a mark of peculiar favour, estimated beyond the usual value of such acts of condescension.

On one morning in particular, the party at Waverton being rather more than usually select, had met in the library, where Sir James, intent upon the plans of his embankment, required the opinion of his lady—indeed, of all the ladies, and the gentlemen too—upon some point of difficult decision to which he was perpetually calling their attention. Mr. Dalrymple was also there ; and, notwithstanding the minute and grave observations he was making upon the plan, his quick eye was ever and anon directed to a group of idlers in another part of the room, of which his own daughter formed the centre and most conspicuous figure ; and no wonder that the ambitious father looked again and again towards that figure, scarcely believing the evidence of his own senses, or deeming it possible that this distinguished and interesting-looking lady, so much at her ease, and evidently so entirely in her element, could really be the same as the raw girl who had so recently been the companion of his own scanty board.

“ She is worth all the money I have spent upon her,” was the very natural conclusion of such a father. But there were other eyes upon her at that moment, looking with equal astonishment, though certainly with less approbation.

A young man had been called into the room—not in-



troduced—that was not necessary. He was simply an assistant in the way of business, and came in when called, with additional rolls of plans, which he placed upon the table, as his business and duty required that he should, no one observing whether he did this with awkwardness or grace, with servility or pride.

Perhaps there might have been detected a slight touch of hauteur in the manner in which the young man walked into the room, had any one looked for it; for it was Arnold Lee who brought in the plans, and it was the first time in his life that he had been ushered into a room of that description, and into the society in which he now found himself, as a menial, or a mere attendant upon others; and the natural pride which can slumber in a cottage, which is not even offended by earthen floors, and whitewashed walls, sometimes swells into impetuous and ungovernable power, when surrounded by all the outward embellishments of worldly distinction, amongst which it occupies no recognized or rightful place.

But if Arnold Lee had to master somewhat of this feeling—and he battled with it manfully before it was mastered—he was suddenly attacked by some other kind of emotion, when, on glancing round the room, he perceived in the figure of the fashionable-looking flirting lady surrounded by her satellites, no other than his pupil of the drawing-school, whose soul, in its simplicity, had appeared to him as beautiful in itself, as it was capable of appreciating beauty in the external world.

It was dangerous to the interests of the embankment that the vision of this morning had struck the eye of Mr. Dalrymple's "young man," as Arnold was now designated; for he neither perceived, nor understood for some time, what was going on at the table where Sir James was



seated, but opened out the wrong plan ; and when sharply rebuked, opened out something which was no plan at all ; and all the while his cheek was burning, and the gentlemen supposed, from his confusion and mistakes, that, like any other raw youth, he was overcome by the embarrassment of being, for the first time, introduced into such an apartment, especially when occupied by such society.

Arnold, however, was not a person to be mastered, even by the new emotion into which he had been surprised ; and recovering himself by one powerful effort, he performed the remaining portion of his duty with all the alacrity, correctness, and decision which were habitual to him. He was, consequently, soon able to look around him without the least embarrassment ; and while older and, on this occasion, cooler heads than his own were busily at work, he could stand erect, and make his observations without any additional colour to his cheek.

The scene above alluded to, and which took place in a different portion of the room, was one so perfectly familiar to all who have seen anything of human life, that it would scarcely have occupied a place in Arnold's mind, nor have attracted his gaze a second time, but that, in spite of all his troubles, all his actual labours, and all his kind anxieties about his family and friends, he had lately been thinking, more frequently than he could account for, about the dark-eyed girl to whom he had engaged to teach the art of drawing ; and somehow or other, though he had amused his fancy by placing her in an immense variety of ideal situations, he had never thought of placing her exactly where she was now. To any one watching her on this occasion, it would, indeed, have been laughable to think what ideal positions had been assigned her by her young tutor. But we will not tell his secrets—only sympathise with him a





*Un jour de la vie*

little, as he stood in silent astonishment, watching what was going on, and at last mentally exclaiming—"Is this your element?" He said no more, even to himself; for his feelings were not yet sufficiently defined to assume even the silent and unutterable language of the heart; but turning again to the actual business of his life, he applied himself to the service of his master, without once more looking away from the plans which it was his duty to unfold.

And Dorothy went flirting on to her heart's content. A gay young officer was by her side, Frederick Ashley at her feet, and others were coming and going, to whom she was equally willing to dispense her smiles, perhaps unconscious at the time that one real friend was worth them all. Unconscious, too, of this grand secret, ever found in the popularity of a distinguished woman, whether moving in the highest circles of fashion, or only just emerging, like Dorothy, from the meanness and obscurity of an unknown habitation—unconscious of this grand secret, that just in proportion as she herself becomes distinguished, just in proportion as she can number admirers in her train, it becomes an object of rivalry and ambition to stand first among these, simply because to do so is to occupy a distinguished place—or, what is sometimes of more importance, to prevent others stepping into it; and that when she flatters herself that her smiles, her society, or even her affections are the only favours sought, a glance into the hearts of her admirers dying at her feet, would reveal the humiliating fact, that it was not so much *for* her, as *against* others, that all that wonderful parade of gallantry had been displayed—not so much to show the world that she was gained, as that a rival or an adversary was conquered, and driven from the field.



It is, indeed, a melancholy sight, to see a vain woman deceiving herself, and being deceived, under these circumstances—laying the flattering unction to her heart that she alone, in her own person and charms, is the sole cause of all the court which, for a time, is paid to her. It is almost more melancholy to watch this delusion at its height, than to see the same woman left by all her admirers, each dropping off in his turn, as the position of standing first becomes less honourable and distinguished ; and thus, as the rivalry cools down, the simple question of admiration dying away, until few will even acknowledge that they ever really felt the sensation. Talk of old age !—But what humiliation is there in the deepest wrinkles ever ploughed by well spent time, and honest industry, in comparison with this ?

Gentle reader, if you and we together are a little disposed to heart-sickness at this page of human life—if the question occurs to you, that where there is so much of folly in the acting, there must at least be some in the voluntary writing—remember that these pages are devoted to a representation of human life such as it is, not such as it ought to be, and to the tracing out of one particular passion through its different modes of manifestation, but especially such as are connected with the ordinary and familiar experience of the great mass of human beings. We gave no promise in the outset of scenes beyond the range of English middle life ; do not, therefore, be so fastidious as to question the operation of those feelings and principles at work in a busy mercantile town of your own country, which would be believed in, perhaps revelled in, if displayed by heroes and heroines in distant climes, breathing the air of courts, or existing under impossible situations. In the present instance, the descriptions may

be at fault, but human life is still the same ; and the follies which are exhibited, the evil passions which are sanctioned, and the crimes which are committed, for the love of Distinction, under the more splendid and fascinating aspect of society, are not less dangerous and culpable, because they there are adorned with distant and imaginary charms.

## CHAPTER XXVII.



THE time of Arnold Lee's absence from his humble home, on the occasion of his committing the faithful servant to the protection of new friends, was one of severe trial to his mother and sister, who felt, for the first time in their lives, the reality of being poor and lonely.

So long as Arnold remained a member of their household, although the hours which he spent in their society were few and precious ; so long as his welcome step was to be listened for, as the night closed in ; so long as his cheerful face came beaming upon them, and his voice, remarkable for its clearness and energy, had ever some kind word to speak, some good to set forth, or some news to tell, they could not realise the entire forlornness of their actual position. Nobody could feel forlorn with Arnold to cheer and help them ; and often when his voice, and looks, and manners, all combined to lift up their very hearts with hope, they had little idea what a man of care he had been—of hard and grinding care ; as he walked with weary steps along the streets, allowing himself to look the sad, downcast being that he really was, until he neared that little tenement, and even placed his hand upon the latch of the door.

It was, indeed, a sad change when he was gone, though but for a short time, into the country—so sad, that even Lucy began to feel the necessity of doing something to cheer the gloom of their long days. Hitherto, she had been the cared-for one herself; but now the mournful spectacle of her mother's drooping form, caught sight of sometimes by a stolen glance, was so affecting to her, that it served in some measure to rouse her from the indulgence of her own incommunicable grief.

The flowers, too, went on well, only that there was no one now to tell her of success, even had there been such pleasant news to tell; neither had that fearful shadow come again; so that, notwithstanding her first strong impressions, Lucy had begun to think, with her brother, they must have arisen out of some phantasm of a disordered brain.

"I will try what *I* can be to my mother," said Lucy, one day, when musing alone; "for after all, my griefs are nothing in comparison with hers;" and with this resolution, she set herself to work with more energy than usual, for hitherto the wax-flower making had been but a languid business, and the roses and carnations had grown but slowly in her hands. On this day, however, it was necessary that she should go out and procure some flowers for imitation, and accordingly her bonnet and shawl were put on, and she was soon pacing, with steps unusually brisk, the walk which led through the cottage garden to an adjoining nursery ground, where the choicest flowers were to be obtained.

Feeling the air fresh and invigorating, for it was a bright autumnal morning, though not unlikely to end in showers, Lucy formed the determination of extending her walk; first having requested the owner of the cottage,



who was working in his garden, to inform her mother that she had gone to the town, to procure some articles of which she was in want. "Perhaps my lily of the valley has been sold," said she, as she walked along in this enterprising spirit, "and then how pleasant it will be to carry home the money, and surprise my mother with the news."

This little flower, executed in a remarkably skilful manner, had been a great favourite with Lucy; she had spent days in forming and adjusting it to her mind, and at last she had felt reluctant to part with any object so entirely beautiful to her eye. But go it must, and she only hoped it might fall into the hands of some one capable of appreciating its peculiar loveliness. To go and see her little flower then, and inquire after its fate, was more to her than any common flower manufacturer could have conceived. It was like looking after some pet child, for the heart of poor Lucy was full of tender feelings, as her brain of delicate fancies; and this simple flower seemed to grow there as closely, and with as entire a separation from all surrounding things, as some gem of the wilderness clings to the sheltering nook in which it has taken root.

It is true that Lucy had some trifling business to transact of a different kind; she had materials to purchase for pursuing her work: but had not this led her to the place where her lily was exposed for sale, it is more than probable she never would have extended her walk so far as to the street in which the large and fashionable shop was situated, where more than one purchaser had already been found for her flowers. It was indeed a formidable undertaking for one so delicate, and of late so feeble, as Lucy had become; for that her health was

wasting away, no one for a moment could doubt, while looking into her clear glassy eyes, and observing the blue about her mouth, and the too exquisite rose colour that rushed into her cheeks with every passing emotion, and then faded away almost as quickly as it came. Still no one doubted but that when the great stroke of her affliction should have passed by, when time should have tempered down the acute sense of her own and her family's fallen state, she would revive and be herself again. It was not natural, they argued, for youth like her's to sink under a mere pecuniary misfortune. The world had too many pleasures for the young, even without the possession of wealth ; and with a mother and brother both so kind, and so tenderly beloved, an affectionate girl must necessarily possess all she could desire.

Thus thought the sagest commentators upon Lucy's case, and thus often did her mother try to think ; but still there was a mystery unrevealed, and too deep even for maternal anxiety to penetrate. Still Mrs. Lee could discover that her beautiful child was fading—fading ! and that with all their endeavours, both to sustain and sooth, she was not comforted. This might be unnatural, but it was not the less true for that, and the mother knew and felt the fearful truth.

Perhaps this fact would have been still more evident to her sensitive mind, had she been present that day in the large and handsome shop when Lucy first came in, fatigued with her walk, and nearly fainting in the entrance, where she clung to whatever support she could find. A chair was, of course, politely offered to her, in which she sank down, almost breathless with exhaustion. It was but a temporary affection, however ; and, untying the strings of her bonnet, so as to let down those rich golden tresses,

which now fell carelessly around her neck, she soon regained sufficient strength to ask for what she wanted ; and while busying herself with the different materials necessary for her art, she took a little additional time for the recovery of her strength.

“ I shall be a long time,” said Lucy, with her accustomed simplicity ; “ perhaps you will allow me to select for myself. Besides which, I want to walk round your splendid rooms, and see some of the beautiful things of which I hear so much.”

The man in attendance bowed politely, and consigning his post to the charge of an inferior, Lucy was left to amuse, as well as recover herself, at her own leisure.

On entering the shop, it had been mere bodily fatigue which bowed down her delicate figure, and sent the beautiful flush into her face. Her spirits were in no way depressed by the walk, but rather exhilarated, and her eye was so gratified by the many splendid and graceful objects around her, that she experienced a sensation almost amounting to pleasure, for the first time during many long days, and often longer nights. Perhaps the secret of the sensation lay in the fact that Lucy was a little child-like in her character and emotions—that she did not reason and reflect, so much as she perceived and felt. Hence the world of art as well as nature had in store for her innumerable pleasures, presented to her mind through the medium of her sight, only that at present there had fallen a dark pall between her and them ; and if to-day there was something like the lifting up of one corner of this pall, so as to allow her to obtain a glimpse beyond, it was only as transient as if a stormy wind, in rushing by, had broken a temporary passage for the sunlight, through those dense clouds which seemed to be shading her and her hopes for ever.

The elegant rooms in which Lucy found so welcome and so timely a rest from her unwonted fatigue, were the resort of many idlers, less occupied than herself; and as the day advanced, it became quite as amusing to see the graceful living forms that came and went, as those, scarcely more graceful, which embellished the apartments. Not that Lucy would have had any wish to mix with them, but, where she was seated, she could enjoy the passing amusement of beholding much that was going on, while screened from observation herself. One thing she had ascertained in a walk round the rooms, before much company had come in—that her lily of the valley was still there; and very beautiful she thought it looked, even in its present position, amongst so many objects of more pretending character.

From where Lucy was seated, her eye took in the full view of her favourite flower, and she saw, with jealous anxiety, the indifference with which it was passed by. At last, however, an elegant and pleasant-looking lady paused beside it, and actually took it up, exclaiming, what “a dear little love” it was. There was a good deal of flutter, some giggling, and now and then a musical laugh about the place; but Lucy, for some time, could see only the figure of the first lady, who appeared to be a very busy, as well as affable person, for the poor flower was snatched from its resting place at the risk, as Lucy thought, of losing half its snowy bells, or, worse still, of a terrible fracture of its dark green leaf, which had cost so much trouble in its execution. And no wonder she trembled for the safety of the flower, for, there emerged from behind some drapery, which hindered her more distant view, other light and graceful figures, all equally amused by some pleasant frolic which seemed to be going on, in connexion with the flower.



But for her property in the machinery of this scene, Lucy would, in all probability, rather have turned away, than continued to gaze, so habitual had her shrinking become, especially of late, from all contact or interference with what did not concern her. Indeed, so strong was this impulse, that she would involuntarily have looked another way, rather than have witnessed, as in the present instance, what appeared to hold no necessary connection with herself, but that she had entirely forgotten herself in the little gem which her own hands had created, and which, from her peculiar taste and fancy, had almost become like a child of her affections.

Amongst the group on which Lucy was so intently gazing, almost unconsciously to herself, there was one prominent and striking figure, which soon commanded all her attention. It was a tall, dark-haired lady, with large, flashing eyes, and brilliant look, though scarcely deserving the name of beauty, yet, at this moment, so animated, bright, and glowing, that no higher perfection of contour or complexion could well have added to the effect which her appearance was capable of producing. That this figure was the centre of attraction to the group, might easily be discovered ; and it was evident, too, that some sort of playful contest was going on, about placing the lily of the valley on the side of her noble looking head, so as to throw it into strong contrast with the deep jet of her shining and luxuriant hair. In order to effect this performance to their wishes, some of the party had forcibly untied the young lady's bonnet, while others, with gentle hands, were playfully constraining her to submit to the fastening of the flower in her hair, in order that an effect, which they all described in the most extravagant terms of enchantment, might be more fully contemplated.

"Allow me," said the voice of a gentleman, and Lucy started as if a peal of thunder had burst over her head, for a tall figure then stepped forward, and when his delicate fingers had carefully adjusted the flower, the dark eyes glanced up to his face with an expression of triumphant satisfaction, as if one victory, at least, was complete.

But, alas, for the poor lily of the valley! It was not formed for such handling, and, in the moment of triumph, the stem was snapped, and the little bells were scattered on the ground.

A general, and very natural idea seemed now to seize the company, that the flower must be paid for; but first, the pleasant looking lady, who had been the most active mover in the scene, stooped down, and carefully gathering up the fragments, endeavoured to put them together, so that they might look as if no injury had been done, declaring, that if she had the flower at home, she could easily make all right again. Then suddenly recollecting that if she took the matter so much into her own hands, she would be responsible for the price, and finding no great alacrity in others to come forward on the occasion, she carelessly threw down the fragments again, and turned away to occupy herself with other things.

"Poor flower!" said the dark-eyed lady, looking down upon the scattered bells, as she still lingered near the spot. "Somebody has made you with delicate and skilful hands. You were too good for such a fate!"

But what has come over that fair pale girl, still seated in her neglected corner? She had watched the whole of this scene like one who gazes with glazed eyes, and cannot close them. No tear, no flush, no start, after the first shock, had agitated her frame. She only sat and gazed on, with eyes wide open, more paralysed than conscious of that

which was transacting before her, and in which, indeed, she had no part. But suddenly, and without knowing it herself, when this one being—a girl about her own age—spoke lovingly of the little flower, and looked sad and sorrowful at its destruction, a flood of tears poured down poor Lucy's cheeks, while an impulse, with difficulty restrained, would have sent her onwards towards that pitying one, to wreath her arms around her neck, and call her by the sweet name of sister.

This impulse was but momentary. The next thing with Lucy was to begone. She had seen *him* as happy and as gay as ever—nay, happier and more gay than he had ever been with her. Why should he not be so? She had no quarrel with his happiness; but she did not wish to look upon it yet. She must begone while she had strength, for a faintness seemed to be stealing over her, as if the atmosphere around, so long as he was present, was a strange element to her, incapable of being breathed. Thus rising from her seat, she almost staggered to the place where her small purchases were waiting, but there *he* was again, and he was *paying for her flower!*

It was impossible for Lucy to escape, without passing so close to Frederick Ashley that her dress very nearly touched his; but she did escape entirely without his notice, for there is a good deal in not being a person thought about or recollected; and Lucy gained the door, and was commencing her journey homeward, when a shopman hurried after her with her packet, the price of which he very politely stated, as he placed it in her hand.

Packet and price were alike unintelligible things to Lucy at that moment, but she mechanically took out her purse, and, with trembling fingers, managed to discharge her debt. She did not, however, perceive that a heavy

rain was falling, that the streets were almost vacated, and that something like a flood was beneath her feet. At that moment she had no power to perceive anything which merely endangered her personal safety. One single and absorbing purpose hurried her along—the desire to escape. And thus she passed down first one long street and then another, almost the only passenger there; the splashing tread of her small feet almost all the sound that could be heard. Unconsciously Lucy permitted empty returning carriages to pass her by, without once attempting to stop them for her use. Unconsciously she allowed her little packet to burst open, and by degrees to escape altogether from her hand. Unconsciously she wandered on and on, instead of taking the nearest way, going round by such a distance as might well have exhausted the strength of a much more able frame. It seemed almost as if some supernatural power was upon her, and she must walk on and on for ever. Had the terrors of a burning prairie been behind her, Lucy could scarcely have pressed onward with more determination; although, beyond the gaining of that lowly dwelling, and the listening again to her mother's welcome voice, she had no thought or purpose in the world. That was something, however. It was something to see the cottage-door open as she drew near, and her mother, anxious, wondering, and almost agonised about her return, standing in the entrance, and extending her arms to receive her child. It was something to fall upon that faithful bosom, and to weep there. But behold! There is something besides tears. No wonder. A purple stain is on her mother's dress—her lips are dyed with blood—she faints—she struggles—that fatal rupture has told the history of her doom.

Still self-possessed, and still forgetful of herself, Mrs.



Lee gently took her almost suffocating child in her arms, and with a strength which, a moment before, she would have believed it impossible to exert, bore her calmly, but speedily, up into the little chamber, where her dripping garments were soon removed, and her death-like figure placed upon the bed.

Those are poor, indeed, who cannot afford to hire a messenger in their distress. Mrs. Lee felt this; she had still enough for such a purpose, and to spare, but there would come after claims, and how could such be met?

"After all," she said to herself, "it is but asking my father, and perhaps pride alone has prevented my doing this before—wounded pride that he did not come, or send to me the necessary help, without my having to ask for it. It is time, however, that such feelings should be laid aside. Life and death are the questions I have to consider now;" so saying, she descended to the lower apartment of the house, occupied by the gardener's mother, and asked if there was either man or boy who could be sent instantly for a doctor.

The woman shook her head; they had neither man nor boy to spare—not they, indeed.

"Will you go yourself, then?" asked Mrs. Lee.

"I?" said the woman, looking out, and her manner expressed the refusal which she did not think it necessary to utter in words.

"I will pay you well, my good woman," said the almost frantic mother, "and you can find yourself a carriage when you reach the town." While saying this, she had taken out her purse, and the poor woman, seeing more hopeful signs than she had anticipated, speedily put on her shawl and bonnet, and disappeared, not, however, without many intelligible murmurings about the ruin of her clothing, consequent upon such an errand.

"It is all very natural," sighed Mrs. Lee, as, almost breathless with anxiety, she again ascended the narrow stairs, dreading to open the white curtains of the bed, lest the spectacle of real death, not its fair semblance, should meet her eye.

For the present, however, all further threatening of danger was over. With perfect composure, Lucy seemed to lie upon her quiet pillow, her golden tresses spread around her, like sunbeams scattered upon snow. The moment her mother approached the bed, however, her eye turned quickly, and almost wildly, to meet her, with an expression so different from her accustomed languid look that Mrs. Lee perceived at once the necessity there was both for prudence and care.

In the hurry and alarm under which the afflicted mother had sent off a messenger for the medical friend who had been accustomed to attend her own family, as well as that of her father's, at Hatherstone, she had not once taken into account the altered and humiliating circumstances under which that friend must now find her. With the first recollection of this fact, a deep flush had spread over her face—so deep, that Lucy, more alive than usual to what was going on, asked her mother what it meant, and spoke of hot feelings which she had herself, "only now and then such chills. It seems to me," she said, "as if that cold rain was still trickling down my limbs."

Mrs. Lee had no further occasion to explain her unaccustomed blush, for long before the doctor arrived, her daughter had commenced a kind of rapid and restless talking, on a vast variety of unconnected subjects, which too clearly indicated the feverish state of her whole frame; and long, very long, did these intervening hours appear to the anxious mother, who could only sit in silence by the

bed, saying nothing herself, but what she thought might tend to soothe and pacify.

At last the wheels of a carriage, and the tread of horses' feet, were heard along the plashy lane, on the side of which the gardener's cottage was situated ; and Mrs. Lee hastening down into the passage, opened the door of the house, in order to facilitate the endeavours of the bewildered coachman to find the right place.

"It is here—here—that Doctor Munroe is wanted!" exclaimed Mrs. Lee, with her voice still suppressed, from the fear of disturbing the busy imagination of her child.

"Here?" exclaimed the footman, who had descended, and was looking with unbelieving eyes at that low tenement. "That is impossible. It is a family of the name of Lee we are looking for ; and we were told they were gentlefolks."

"So they were, once," said Mrs. Lee. "But never mind that ; Doctor Munroe is wanted here immediately. I am sure *he* will not mind coming in."

The portly old gentleman inside the carriage looked as if he *would* mind though, notwithstanding what the lady said ; for Lee being by no means an uncommon name, he had failed to apply it in idea to any one he had ever known before ; and still less would he have expected to recognize within the walls of this miserable abode, the person of his once little friend, Mary Staunton, of Hatherstone, whom he had known as a child, and afterwards had regarded as the wealthy parent of a happy and hopeful family. It is true the story of the failure, and total ruin of the Lees, had reached his ear, as well as others ; but failures were not thought much about in the large and flourishing town of M—— ; and the good doctor had a dis-

tinctly prevailing impression on his mind, that Mrs. Lee herself would not be much the worse for her husband's failure. Perhaps, to sum the whole matter up more fairly, the doctor had other things to think about, and consequently it was some time before he could at all be made to understand that he had had any previous acquaintance with the afflicted mother, who now, after failing in her first attempts to recal herself to his memory, conducted him up the steep and difficult stairs, as well as she was able, and brought him at last, without further explanation, to the bedside of her suffering child.

Here his mind and memory were no longer at fault, so far as related to the indications of disease; and beholding before him a case requiring the utmost care, he gave himself, head and heart, to the direct duties of his calling, without further questioning as to the necessity of risking his own health and comfort for a young person in that sphere of life.

After a long interview, in which the doctor put many close and trying questions, respecting Lucy's previous state of health, both of body and mind, all which her mother replied to with the fullest assurance, that nothing touching her feelings had occurred, except one great family trial, of a pecuniary nature—nothing in fact by which a girl of her character and disposition would be likely to be seriously affected, the doctor descended again the steep and difficult stairs, to hold the accustomed interview, in the little apartment where, indeed, it was difficult to find a seat adapted to the comfort and security of so large and important a person.

"We have got an unpleasant kind of case here, my good woman," said he, while endeavouring to adjust himself upon the offered chair; and then, after tapping the



lid of his snuff-box, he looked up and repeated, "a very troublesome case, my dear madam."

It was evident, from the turn given to this expression, that the doctor, unconsciously to himself, had become aware he was in the presence of a gentlewoman; and Mrs. Lee feeling that, in spite of all her efforts, tears would rush into her eyes, and blind her sight, and choke her utterance, held out her hand to the doctor, saying, as she did so, "You do not recollect me, I think, sir.\*"

"I beg your pardon," said the bewildered old gentleman, looking earnestly into her face, and growing strangely uneasy under a confused sense of the impossibility of identifying that face and figure with the surrounding scene. "I beg your pardon," he repeated, "I must request some further explanation, for you puzzle me exceedingly."

"You have heard," said Mrs. Lee, "of the dreadful calamity which has overtaken a family of the name of Lee?"

"Of course," replied the doctor.

"I am the unfortunate wife of that bankrupt merchant," said Mrs. Lee; "the mother of those destitute children. I am also—or rather I was once—your little friend Mary Staunton, of Hathestone Hall."

The good doctor was too much astonished—too much shocked and grieved, to find expression for his feelings except in the most incoherent exclamations. When these had a little subsided, he took the hand of Mrs. Lee within both his own, and looking kindly into her face, said softly, "I suppose you know what has taken place at the Hall?"

"I know nothing," replied Mrs. Lee, "beyond the narrow circle of my own cares. I can bear anything now; do not scruple to tell me—is my father dead?"

"No, no, no, not dead," said the doctor; "rather on the improve, I should say, now—the last day or so decidedly more himself—recovering his arm, too; all very good symptoms."

"Has he then had a stroke?" asked Mrs. Lee.

"Something of that kind," replied the doctor, "very serious—very serious, indeed, at one time."

"And no one told me of it?" explained Mrs. Lee.

"What would have been the use, my dear lady," observed the doctor. "You could have done nothing. I almost feared, at one time, that even my skill would have been at fault. Be thankful that you have been spared some pain, and that you only hear of it now when all danger is over."

"And are you sure that all danger is over?" asked Mrs. Lee.

"All immediate danger, most certainly," replied the doctor.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Lee, "you do not know half the pain which this sad intelligence gives me. I have actually been thinking hard thoughts of my father, because he did not write or send to me in my distress. I was actually harbouring in my heart a sort of proud and wounded feeling towards him, while he was lying insensible on the very borders of the grave."

"And therefore unable to be hurt by your hard thoughts," said the doctor in a playful tone; and again taking her hand, "Come, come," he continued, "you have troubles enough without this, or I am much mistaken; we must talk again of this poor girl."

"Ah! true," said Mrs. Lee, "it is indeed with that that I have the most immediate concern. You think her very seriously ill?"

"I think her very seriously affected," replied the doctor, "for a constitution like hers. The affair itself is a mere accident, and to some persons of little moment; but I confess I do not like the look of the girl altogether—strange words, are they not, in connection with such uncommon beauty? yet that very beauty makes one fear the more. This place, too," said the doctor, looking round him, and shrugging his shoulders—"I tell you plainly, Mrs. Lee, I don't like it at all."

A faint smile played over the pale features of the mother, for she thought the doctor's conclusion a very natural one to arrive at; but it was a remark which, in her present circumstances, admitted of no reply. It would have been a mockery to common sense to say she *did* like the place, and to complain of it would have been too much like an indirect appeal for that charitable assistance which she had made up her mind to receive in one way, and in no other. Silently therefore she stood by, while the doctor wrote out his prescription, which he had placed in her hand, before recollecting that she might not have even the means of procuring the necessaries prescribed. Reclaiming his paper, he therefore added—"Let me see—let me see—this shall be sent to you before night. And now, my little friend Mary, who once was, must have no foolish scruples, or false delicacy, about anything likely to do good to her child."

Mrs., Lee who perfectly understood the meaning of the kind-hearted old man, thanked him with gratitude and tears. She did not know that her husband's name stood then upon his books for debts unpaid, during many years of faithful attendance upon the family.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.



ALTHOUGH it was impossible for a mind like Betsy Burton's to understand the notoriety attaching to the mere fact of a young lady visiting a prison, yet from the frequency with which this fact was mentioned, and the ardour with which the same idea was caught up by other young ladies, all anxious for the distinction of being prison visitors, she could not but augur some good; so far, at least, as might be derived from the subject itself being brought prominently before the notice of the public.

Still there was much in this suddenly awakened passion for prison visiting, and in the peculiar manner in which her poor simple-hearted brother was talked about, which might well have puzzled a more philosophical mind than Betsy's to account for. That "there was nothing to see in James more than other men, that she could discover," was often the wondering remark which Betsy made to herself, as she went murmuring about the house. For being entirely shut out, by mutually acknowledged uncongeniality, from all intimate communication with her fellow-servant, her full heart was reduced to the necessity of unburdening itself to the chairs and tables, but especially to



an empty bedstead in an unoccupied chamber, where she often took her work, and sat alone, for the purpose of indulging her sad thoughts, and cogitating upon her numerous plans, without interruption.

To these sad thoughts had now been added the scarcely less distressing knowledge of the sudden and alarming illness of Lucy Lee ; and, remembering the strangeness of her manner, and the abstraction of mind which had marked her return from Hatherstone, the faithful nurse who had watched so tenderly over her childhood, could not but feel an anxious and fearful apprehension, lest there might be more in this illness than even her medical attendants might be aware of.

“I knew there was something coming on,” said Betsy, mistaking, as knowing people so often do, the results of one circumstance, for the indications of another. “I could read it in her face. If there was not death stamped there, my name’s not Betsy Burton.”

So saying, the good woman stitched away, her eyes occasionally a little dimmed, and requiring the quick application of her handkerchief to clear the mist away ; until at last, unable any longer to endure the painful uncertainty and suspense under which she laboured, she determined to ask permission to pay a visit to her former mistress in her now humble and, as she called it, *miserable* abode ; and this purpose she was the more desirous to accomplish, on account of the absence of Arnold Lee, which she knew would throw a double weight of anxiety and distress upon his mother.

In Mr. Dalrymple’s household there was really so little to do, except on those occasions when Betsy’s especial assistance and advice were required, that it was no difficult matter to obtain leave of absence for the remainder of the

day ; and had she only mentioned to her young mistress that it was the sister of Arnold Lee who claimed her kind attentions, days, or even weeks, might have been substituted for the few hours which she asked for.

On this point, however, Betsy was secret as the grave. She knew the feelings of her former mistress, and those of the family, too well, to make their sufferings and poverty the subject either of wonder or of pity to common minds ; and she had already seen too much of the circle with whom she was now associated, to trust in their hearing even a casual remark upon the unfortunate Lees ; for though Dorothy and her aunt, from their hitherto obscure and retired mode of living, had heard nothing, or more probably had thought nothing, of the great failure and forgery in which Mr. Lee himself was implicated ; there were few amongst the number of their friends, who were not sufficiently well-informed on this subject to catch at the history of the ruined family with considerable eagerness, and to seize hold of any description which might be obtained of their degradation and sufferings, so as to pass it about in society as rather a *telling* kind of subject.

“ It’s all very well,” said Betsy, as she turned this subject over in her mind ; “ it’s all very well to go and see poor James, and the more who look at him the better, for it’s only to see his face, poor innocent, to know that he’s as harmless as a lamb ; but they shall never get the run of that miserable cabin, as they have of his prison. Why, the house would never be clear of them ; and when they saw that beautiful young creature laid on her sick bed, they’d be sending painters to paint her, and book-writers to write about her, and nobody knows what. No, no, trust me for that. This young mistress of ours is all very well in her way ; but it’s a queer way for all that, and beats me entirely.”

As Betsy uttered this soliloquy, she tied on her bonnet and descended to the passage below ; when, hearing the bell ring suddenly, as if to stop her from going out, she entered the parlour, where a pleasant little company of callers were amusing themselves, Mrs. Norris and Frederick Ashley being of the number.

At the sight of Betsy, the latter evidently recognised a well-known face ; but he offered no voluntary acknowledgment that he did so, and it was not her business to recognise him.

“ We stopped you from going out,” said Dorothy, “ because these good friends of mine wish to hear more of your poor brother ;” and as she said this, it was not difficult to hear the remark—“ Quite a character !” passing from one lady to another, as they eyed Betsy, as if she had been some beast or bird brought in for exhibition.

It was evident that Betsy was introduced for the express purpose of making speeches, of creating a sensation, and, in short, of amusing the company ; but as show children, and show pets of every kind, when exhibited for the same purpose, are apt to disappoint awakened expectation, so Betsy Burton, perhaps a little too conscious of the spirit which prompted this movement, had very little to say on the occasion, nor, in what she did utter, was there much for the ladies to take away with them, to make stories of for the evening, or for the calls which they had yet in prospect.

“ We want,” said Mrs. Norris, who was the most persevering, and who spoke in her sweetest and most sympathising voice, “ to hear more of that dear brother of yours.”

“ And so do I,” replied Betsy. “ I want to hear that he’s set at liberty, and that the right man is found.”

"But we hear so much about him in his prison," continued the fair speaker—"in his affliction—in his chains."

"That's more than I do," observed Betsy, rather sharply.

"We hear he is so extremely interesting," said a very juvenile performer in the scene.

"It would make anybody interesting, to be treated as he has been treated," replied Betsy.

"He has children too, we hear," said another sympathiser, a little more advanced in years.

"A dozen, at least," replied Betsy.

"A fine figure, has he not?" asked the young lady again.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Betsy.

"And a splendid head of hair," observed Mrs. Norris.

"As to that," said Betsy, "it struck me it would be all the better for a comb."

The ladies knew not what to make of the strange person who stood before them. They had expected the most violent exclamations of grief, with tears, and the wringing of hands, and all other essentials to an agonizing scene; but this woman was quite common-place in her distress, if, indeed, she could be distressed at all, with such a self-supported manner; and Dorothy, perceiving that her introduction of Betsy, which Mrs. Norris had insisted upon, was likely to prove a failure, gave her permission to proceed on her journey, remarking, as she left the room, "I told you she was an odd kind of being, and this morning you see it is not her pleasure to come out. I dare say she detected some whispering and smiling as she came in, and I assure you she is as quick to feel, as she is to perceive."

"She has rather a remarkable grey eye," observed one lady, "with a dark rim round the pupil. I have heard that such eyes are always far-sighted."



"And did you catch the outline of her chin?" asked Mrs. Norris. "I never saw anything like it in my life—quite a study."

"Classical, do you mean?" asked Dorothy. But the peculiar smile and manner with which she said this, as usual, were lost upon her unsuspecting friend, of whom it might be said, if there *was* one thing in the world of which she was too profoundly ignorant even to attempt an imitation of it, that one thing was the art of ridicule.

In the meantime Betsy Burton was pursuing her way, the more rapidly, perhaps, that her feelings had been a little irritated by the scene she had recently passed through; and the expression—"That's what I call twaddle!" might more than once have been overheard escaping from her lips, had any listener been near. As it was, she had few companions by the way; for not being in a mood to face the busy throngs that peopled the streets of the great town, nor feeling very anxious for more recognitions than were absolutely necessary, now that she was looked upon as the sister of a condemned criminal, she struck off into a well-known path which led her past, rather than through, the town; and so, winding along less-frequented lanes, and past the backs of houses, found herself at last quite in the country, so far, at least, as the rural nature of the scenery around her might deserve that name.

Her thoughts always turning towards the same point, if not actually occupied by the same subject, Betsy yielded to a strong inclination which she felt, to communicate, not for the first time, with an old man who held the office of sexton in connection with a church and burial-ground in the neighbourhood which she was now traversing. The cause of this strong feeling was the fact of the body of the old miser having been consigned to this quiet resting-

place, though not to repose with the accustomed security of the dead; for report had reached the ear of Betsy, that for a second time, and that very recently, the body had been exhumed; and she now determined to see the old man above alluded to, and to hear from his lips a more authentic account of the whole matter.

Happily for her purpose, the sexton was at his work, and being previously acquainted with the name and circumstances of Betsy, the subject of her inquiries was soon introduced; nor was it uninteresting to the sister to learn from this person, how an increasing belief was gaining ground that the death of the old man had been occasioned by a fall, and not by the stroke of a murderer. "If so," he continued, "there's nothing to be proved against that poor brother of yours—not even robbery, for as they tell me, there was nothing found upon him."

"Robbery!" said Betsy, and she lifted her head as if that were a still fouler stain than murder to attach to her family name; but, suddenly recollecting herself, she laid aside her wounded pride, and went on.—"But somebody must have done even *that*, you know, Jackson. My brother James, who never told a lie—not a *real* lie—in his whole life, declares that he saw a third party, a tall active man, muffled about his neck, and wrapped in a long great coat, struggling with the old man for a bag of money, which he wrenched from his hand, and then escaped through the garden.

"Hush!" said the sexton, lifting up his finger, and looking round very suspiciously, as if to ascertain that no ear was within sound of their voices. "Step this way with me," he continued; and he led Betsy to the unfrequented side of the church, and then, again examining the walls and the bushes, he approached very close to his anxious

listener, and holding up one hand against his mouth, as if to prevent the slightest whisper from escaping, he said—"Don't you speak a word, not to nobody; but there's been a man here to me;" and he nodded his head as if that was to serve instead of further intelligence, but his auditor, being by no means satisfied, urged him to go on, and with a violent stroke upon his thigh, he concluded his history by saying—"if that man doesn't know all about it, I'll eat my hat, and I've got no other."

"But what kind of man was he?" asked Betsy, very naturally, "and what makes you think he knows?"

"Why, as to the kind of man," replied the sexton, raising the hat of which he had spoken, and looking down thoughtfully, "that would puzzle me to say. He came to me in the dusk, just as I was locking up, you see; and I was later than common that night. His face I never saw; he was too cunning for that, and stood shouldering me this way, talking backwards as one may say."

"But what did he say to you?" inquired Betsy, still more eagerly.

"First he asked about that old fellow that lies yonder—him there's been such a stir about—how he came by his death, and all that; and when I told him it was a murder, and that a man was taken up for it, he started as if a pistol shot had struck him."

"Did he ask you what man?" inquired Betsy.

"Yes," replied the sexton; "but his voice and way of speaking was changed altogether. At first he had spoken like one of us—vulgarly, as one may say; but he spoke like a gentleman then, and down in his throat, like as if he was choking."

"What did you tell him," asked Betsy, "in answer to his questions."

"I told him that the man in prison, lying under suspicion, for he was not condemned then, was an honest man—an innocent man—one that nobody that knew him could believe to be guilty, and that if he knew anything that would clear him, it behoved him to speak out, and speak quickly."

"And what did he say to that?" asked Betsy.

"Nothing," replied the man; "but stooped his head lower than before, and so walked away."

"You should have laid hands upon him," exclaimed Betsy, "and not have let him go."

"Why, so I might," replied the man, "but don't you see as how these things don't always strike one at the time? I tell you honestly, I never once thought of that man knowing more than I did while he stood there. Besides which, it might have been an ugly sort of business, all by myself as I was, and a churchyard not being the most encouraging place in the world."

"I would have seized him though," said Betsy.

"You?" replied the man, rather contemptuously, and again resuming his spade. "Women can do wonderful things, to hear them talk;" he murmured to himself, while Betsy stood without heeding him, her eyes fixed and her arms folded, as if she pondered in her heart some question of life and death. And so, in fact, she did; but how to act, or to use her own expression, "which way to turn herself, she knew no more than the man in the moon."

Recovering at last from her reverie, Betsy Burton walked again to where the sexton was at work; and, after questioning him with the utmost minuteness, as to the size, figure, and general appearance of the mysterious being who had formed the subject of their previous con-



versation, she turned at last reluctantly away, and prepared to pursue her journey, which, however, had lost much of its interest to her absorbed and excited mind.

"If it *should* be the man himself," she mentally ejaculated, and at the same time, stopped suddenly on a public road, unconscious that she did so—"and if it should," she murmured as she resumed her walk, "he's a hard-hearted villain, and would sooner see the death of twenty innocent men, than offer himself up to justice. I know him of old," muttered Betsy through her teeth, and she drew a long desponding sigh, and then walked on.

Still, however, that one thought, and that alone was present to the woman's mind, as now she hastened on through more frequented ways; and, inwardly resolving to pursue the subject, and to set others to pursue it, until something definite should be discovered, she determined that her visit to the Lees should not be lengthened to the full leave of absence which she had obtained.

If, however, that one thought retained its pre-eminence while Betsy pursued her way, undisturbed by any other, the case was altered by her approach to the gardener's lowly cottage, and by the rushing in of all those old associations which naturally crowded upon her at the sight of faces so familiar and so beloved as those of the mother and daughter, who now welcomed her with all the affection of friends; and forgot, as well they might, in her noble and generous kindness, all the distinctions which might have separated her from them.

It was indeed a satisfaction to the anxious and harassed mind of Mrs. Lee, to have so experienced and faithful a friend as Betsy to communicate with. Speechless, as she was compelled to be, in the presence of her daughter, regarding all the most serious apprehensions which weighed

upon her soul, she poured into the attentive ear of Betsy, without reserve, everything which she most felt or feared respecting her suffering child.

There are few sympathisers in the higher walks of life, who can make themselves half so welcome in times of sorrow, and especially in times of sickness, as a true-hearted, sensible, and long-tried servant. Betsy was all this to the watching, wearied mother; and long was the earnest consultation which they held together, before she was even permitted to behold the object of this tenderness and solicitude. At last, however, she was allowed to ascend to that little chamber, and she sighed audibly as she went, at the thought of finding the child of luxury, and of so many fond attentions, now suffering in such a place.

Had Betsy been a mere common observer, she might have said that Lucy Lee was looking better than she had ever seen her before; for, unquestionably, her eyes were brighter, and more animated, and there was a burning spot upon each cheek, so brilliant as to mock the hue of the autumnal roses which her mother had carefully placed in the room, so that she could see them from her pillow. But the heavy eye-lids which half shrouded those sparkling eyes; and the lips, already contracted and parched with the hot, feverish breath; the feeble hand, always so white, but now so exquisitely beautiful, all told their own tale; and, to one who had watched the development of so much loveliness from childhood, had tended it like a delicate flower, and often trembled lest the winds should pass over it too rudely; to one who had wondered through so many hours of faithful and unwearied watching, to what that beauty would lead, by whom it would be cherished, what wing would shelter it,

or where it would find a place of security, and bliss—to such an one it was indeed an appalling spectacle to behold it now, just glowing, and burning, and making ready for the grave.

“It was fit for a king’s ransom,” said Betsy to herself; “and now it must go down into the dust, and find its companions in the worms. If time had been given it to fade—if silver threads had come in amongst that golden hair, or wrinkles on that snow white brow, I could have borne to think of it. But God’s will be done. There might have come sorrow with grey hairs, and sin and shame with a faded cheek. Go then, poor lamb, thy Father’s fold is safer than this stormy world.”

Such was the silent soliloquy of the faithful servant, as she shrouded herself for a moment behind the curtains of the bed until the tears which would obtrude themselves could be cleared away from her eyes. But she was soon able to appear perfectly cheerful and self-possessed, and entered into conversation with the suffering girl, in a manner so gentle and subdued, that no one who had seen Betsy Burton only under the influence of her more tumultuous feelings, in cases where there was urgent business to be done, but especially where there was wrong or injustice to be resisted, would have believed it possible for her to assume this gentle, soothing manner, even had it been beside the bed of death.

This power of adaptation to circumstances, found almost equally in all classes of society, and apparently the result of some quick instinct, rather than of reason, is perhaps the most precious of all the natural gifts with which woman is endowed. Without this power, however lovely, or however learned in herself, she represents little better than a blank, or a blot in the creation. She has no place as



a woman, because she fits into none. Would, then, that with our boasted systems of education, we could so manage as to cultivate this power !

It was evident on this occasion, as it had been on many others, that even Betsy Burton could master her strong passions and emotions, when she saw and felt a sufficient cause for doing so. In the present instance she was sufficiently tried ; for Lucy, flushed and agitated by fever, had a strong propensity to talk, and asked a thousand questions, particularly respecting James Burton and his melancholy situation, eliciting from Betsy every fact relating to his trial, with every other which she could obtain. And yet to all these questions Betsy answered calmly and dispassionately, keeping under, rather than exaggerating, the cruelty and injustice with which she believed her brother to have been treated.

Much as Mrs. Lee had rejoiced to welcome so true a friend, both she and her visitor began to feel that the presence of a third party was more exciting than really beneficial to the invalid ; and after a few whispers of intelligence had passed between them, Mrs. Lee retired from the chamber, leaving Betsy to take leave of her daughter alone.

" Is my mother gone ? " asked Lucy, in a manner still more eager and agitated than before.

" She is," replied Betsy, " and I am going too."

" Don't go just yet," said Lucy ; " I want to tell you something."

" But the day is drawing in," observed Betsy, " and I have a long way to go."

" You must hear me first," said Lucy, starting up from her pillow. " I have been so wishing to tell you, for you know I dare not say a word to my poor mother, and Arnold is away."



"What is it, dearest?" asked Betsy.

Lucy fixed her eyes upon the face of her companion, and said, in a deep earnest whisper—"I believe my father is somewhere in the neighbourhood."

Betsy started almost from her chair, but soon recollecting herself, inquired what reason she had for thinking so.

"Once—twice," said Lucy, "before Arnold went from home, when I was all alone in the little room below, I am quite sure that he was near the window, and looked in."

"But did you really see him?" asked Betsy.

"Yes," replied Lucy; "but Arnold would not believe it, and persuaded me that I had been mistaken."

"No doubt you were," observed Betsy, very quietly, yet trembling all over with agitation, excited by this strange and unexpected confirmation of the sexton's story. "Tell me all about it, dear," she continued. "But tell me quietly. Lie down again, and I will sit quite still and listen to you."

Lucy, however, was too earnest to obey, and leaning on one elbow, and still looking very wild, went on to say—"It is not *that* particularly that I want to tell you, for I might have been mistaken then. But another time—it was the night of my great illness, after that kind doctor had been here. You know what a storm there had been, but the moon broke forth in the night, making it almost as bright as day. I was very hot and feverish, and could not sleep; and though strictly ordered to keep very still, once, when my mother had gone down for water, I felt so wild, you cannot think, and jumping from the bed, I threw open the window, and looked out. You know this chamber *is* very small, and sometimes I do so want to breathe and cannot. Well, as I said before, scarcely knowing or caring what I did, I threw open the window, and looked

out into the clear moonlight, and there stood the figure of a man against that hedge on the other side of the road, and I knew it was my father."

"How could you know?" said Betsy.

"Ah!" said Lucy, "does a child not easily know the figure of her father? It was not his dress, for nothing could be more unlike than that. But still I knew him, and I feel sure that he knew me. I feel sure that he is somewhere about, watching us, and the thought haunts me night and day. Do you think he would be taken up, Betsy, and tried for forgery, if he should be discovered?"

Betsy had very nearly let slip some hasty expression about "serving him right;" but even at this crisis she was able to command herself, and hearing the step of Mrs. Lee upon the stairs, she hastily adjusted the pillow of the invalid, and whispering in her ear a strict charge to communicate nothing of what she had seen to her mother, she hastily took her leave, promising soon to repeat her visit.

Mrs. Lee knew nothing of what had passed. She saw only the agitated look, she felt only the fluttering pulse, of her daughter, and with a few comments upon the desirableness of remaining quiet, she also took leave of Betsy in the room below; for as the darkness of an autumn evening was now stealing on, there would have been neither wisdom nor kindness in detaining her longer.

## CHAPTER XXIX.



BEFORE Betsy Burton emerged from the narrow lane which led immediately past the front of the gardener's cottage, the harvest moon had risen, and was shining full upon her path. There was something cheering in its soft and yellow light, and with a quickened step she hastened on, as if some gleam of hope was mingling with the moonbeams which glanced across her way.

"I know it is not so," said she, vainly endeavouring to keep down this welcome feeling, lest it should lift her from the depths of despondency, only to be plunged down lower than before—"I know it is not so—that there is no more conscience in that man than in yonder dead stump of a wayside tree; and that sooner than deliver himself up to justice, he would see not only one man, but the whole race of mankind, root and branch, destroyed; but still I should like to meet him face to face, with my hand grasped tight upon his collar, and half a dozen policemen within call. I should like to tell him my mind of the part he is playing, and what he is likely to meet with in the next world, if not in this."

As Betsy carried on this communion with her own

thoughts, the darkness gathered around her ; and, except for the light of the moon, it might have been difficult to trace the circuitous footpath which led her again by fields and cottages, and farm houses, back along the outskirts of the town, to the distant quarter where her present master resided. A more timid traveller than herself would scarcely have ventured upon such a path alone, at the close of day ; but, in addition to her natural fearlessness of character, her thoughts were too entirely absorbed at this moment to allow the idea of danger to herself to interrupt her progress.

The path by which Betsy Burton returned lay very near the churchyard where her steps had lingered in the earlier part of the day ; and the intelligence gathered from the sexton there, with the suspicions it excited, confirmed by the subsequent impressions so vividly described by Lucy Lee, all tended to attract her, by a kind of fascination, to a spot not otherwise likely to be visited as a matter of choice by any female traveller wandering at that hour alone.

“ I could easily set the police after him,” said Betsy to herself, as she looked round about her stealthily in the dim light, “ and I will, too, if I fail to meet with him myself ; but that would be making such a dreadful business of it, and might be hurtful to *her*, poor dear soul, if she knew that I had been the means of bringing him to punishment. Far better would it be, if I could frighten him into doing it for himself, for to make him do it any other way would be no easy matter. And now, if luck would befriend me to come upon him this blessed night, I feel as if I could deal with him now. People say there are ways of calling evil spirits up. I wish I knew some of them, just now ; for his spirit is evil enough, of a certainty, to be called up either by witch or wizard.”



As Betsy pursued these cogitations, she crept almost silently along a low wall which separated the churchyard from the lane, and over which she was able to look at intervals, between the bushes of elder and other stunted trees, which formed a partial screen to the humble graves enclosed within that obscure resting-place. There was no definite expectation in her mind that she should really encounter the object of her quest—perhaps no real belief that he had in his own person been seen in the neighbourhood at all ; but she was in a musing, anxious, unquiet mood, her thoughts unsettled, and her apprehensions strangely excited, by all that she had heard ; and moreover, she felt little inclination to mingle again in the society of those whose sympathies were so totally foreign to her own. And thus, however faint the glimmering of hope which detained her where she stood, the inclination to proceed to her new home was fainter still.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Betsy Burton was not romantic, that the moon had little influence upon her strong and active mind ; neither had the churchyard any terrors for one who believed devoutly, in relation to departed spirits, that this world was too bad for the good to return to, and too good for the bad. As to evil spirits in general, too, and all supernatural apprehensions from powers of that description, she was accustomed to maintain that there was wickedness enough in human form to do all the devil's business upon earth ; and that until mankind grew a great deal better than they were, she never could be brought to believe it necessary to call any evil spirit back again from hell.

But strong as her convictions on this point were, and always had been, even the compact and healthy form of Betsy Burton was thrown into a sudden tremor, as she





stood gazing through the bushes full into that old churchyard, where the gravestones gleamed so white amongst the grassy mounds, and all besides the one object which now attracted her astonished eye, looked more than usually still and solemn.

What could this object be? Was it, after all, a spirit; and had the strong faith of so many years now to be thrown down in one fearful moment?

"I never heard tell that spirits were hurtful," said Betsy to herself, now questioning whether she should approach nearer to the spot; and, strange as it may seem, losing all thought, at the present startling moment, of that which had so entirely occupied her mind before; for that the strange spectacle before her should really be a living human form, she entertained not the remotest idea.

"I never heard that they were hurtful to those who did not fear them," she said again; and so gathered up her courage to proceed stealthily along, a little nearer to the grave, on which it seemed to her that a strange distorted figure was reclining. But in another instant the truth was revealed. It was indeed that wretched man, and with something like the spring of a tiger, Betsy rushed to the spot.

Had two beasts of prey, whose natures were at enmity, in this manner confronted each other, it could scarcely have been with more apparent hatred and repulsion, than Betsy and her former master looked in each other's faces at this moment. Starting up from the recumbent attitude, in which, but an instant before, he had evidently been sinking as if surrendered in heart and soul, in life and limb, he now assumed the defiance of recklessness and despair; yet glaring hastily around, as if to assure himself of the chance of escape, and evidently keeping two



purposes in view, resistance to that daring and obtrusive woman, and the certainty of eluding further detection and pursuit.

"You need not look around, and prepare yourself to run," said Betsy, in her firmest and most collected manner, "go where you will, there's a power in my voice that can wake the neighbourhood, and depend upon it, I'll not spare you—you haven't spared me and mine. You need not feel for your pistols, either," for he was already fumbling in his loosened vest; "before you can have them ready, there will be a cry ringing round the walls of that old church, loud enough to wake the very dead."

"What is it that you want, then?" said the man. "Make short work of it; for I can tell you that I am no pleasant person to encounter just now, and should think as little of burying you here, as of stamping upon this grave."

"Stamp again," said the undaunted woman. "You'll not frighten me. It's those who have guilty consciences that have cause to tremble.—Stamp again," she continued; "only see that it is not upon the man you murdered."

"Upon what?"

"Upon the old man that you murdered in the dark; and then set the officers of justice upon a poor innocent, and let him hang for it, and so committed two murders instead of one."

"What?"

"You don't understand me, perhaps?"

"No."

Betsy drew nearer, and spoke with outstretched neck, as if she would, indeed, have thrust daggers instead of words into his ear—"You don't remember an old miser who

lived in a miserable hovel on the road side leading to——. You don't remember once, some ten or twelve years ago, holding parley with this man in his garden, and leaping over the wall, and coming into your own house with a bloody hand that night. You don't remember since then, having high words with the same man, and trying to rob him of his gold, and knocking him down, old man as he was, upon the hard stones, and wringing from his hand a bag of money that never did him any good as it seems, nor you either. You don't remember anything of this, do you? Nor know that the very man you robbed and murdered lies here in this churchyard? You don't remember that you had an angel wife, and children worthy of a better father, and that they were served faithfully, as one may say, by one Betsy Burton, who had a brother, innocent and harmless as a lamb; and that this same brother it was that stood foolishly about that garden, and saw your murdering and sinful deed, and is ready at this moment to bear witness against you as the guilty man; only that through your selfish cunning, and lies, and wickedness, he now lies in prison himself, under sentence of death, for a deed which you know, and heaven knows, and hell knows, too, that you yourself committed. You don't remember anything of all this—do you?"

Notwithstanding his assumed attitude of defiance, the figure of the wretched man had begun gradually to relax, long before Betsy had concluded her harangue, which however, she was not slow to utter; for once having gained the opportunity of speaking what had for such a length of time been weighing on her heavy heart, it needed no studied form of language, no power of eloquence or choice of words, to afford facility in the unburdening of her indignant and overloaded mind.

Betsy now looked with intent and searching gaze into the fallen countenance of him who stood before her, as if to watch the effect produced by her own words. If he did not now understand the case in all its bearings, it was no fault of hers—if he did not now feel it in all its horrors, she was ready for a second attack, and the fear of man was not before her eyes.

“Tell your horrid story again,” said the man, with a voice and manner so subdued, that Betsy, while she went over the same circumstances more in detail, and spared nothing of the real facts, softened her own voice, and spoke in a manner equally strong, but with less of taunting and reproach. Only that she could not help saying at the conclusion of her history—“You seem dull of comprehension, sir.”

“And yet,” he replied, “I can help you to one fact.”

“What is it?” asked Betsy.

“That old murdered man, found dead upon the stones, and now buried here in this churchyard—exhumed more than once, it seems, to discover how the fatal blow was struck—that old man was my father.”

It was now Betsy’s turn to start and shudder; while she exclaimed—“Horror upon horrors! and you have killed your own father.”

“Killed him, most certainly; but that I never knew until three days ago.”

“Then you did not murder him by design?”

“Most assuredly I did not; and, if you doubt my word, ask yourself one question—why should I?”

“Why, truly, there does lie a difficulty there; only that there are such things as spite and malice, and rampant wickedness that spares neither father, nor mother, brother, sister, nor child.”

"Madness may feel such malice; but I was not mad. I only wish I was, or could be mad."

"Madness mostly comes soon enough. But do you really say that that old man was your father?"

"I do."

"Then who are you?"

"A baseborn wretch, who, with some natural cleverness, struggled on along a high road that many more are travelling. I began by despising my father, and I ended by killing him."

"But you were always considered a gentleman?"

"I had a right to be considered such, amongst those with whom I associated; for I had qualifications equal to theirs, and surpassing many. English society, in the sphere of business, has no need to blush at the rarity of an origin like mine. The root of the evil with me, was that I *did* blush—that I commenced my career with a lie, and that this lie was but the beginning of thousands."

"But you were always thought such a rich man, too. Why I can remember my mother telling of the time when you first came to settle in this place, and what a match it was thought for any merchant's daughter who should marry you."

"Your mother was right in that. The parties who took me up were more to blame than I was at that time. I was but trying a daring experiment. Every day I expected to fail, until I discovered that a certain confident and daring manner, large warehouses, a handsome residence of my own, and altogether a plausible exterior, were sufficient passports for me into the society in which I desired to move. It is true, I had the advantage of education, though a somewhat superficial one, and beyond that, of an early initiation into the details of business, where it



was carried on more successfully than honestly. Thus, I brought with me no mean qualifications for pursuing the one object of my life. But why do I stand here talking to you? You only want my life. It is but delaying the grasp of some ruffian at my throat ;” and he looked round, as if a step had suddenly been heard behind him, at the same time clenching the pistol secured in his bosom.

“ It was nothing,” said Betsy. “ Be still, and speak to me again. It is something to be able to do justice to a miserable villain like you. It is something to know how a man may have been bred, as one may say, to villany ; and I want to hear more of that old man, for it strikes me I have often seen him.

“ No doubt you have. It was the bane of my life, that he followed me wherever I went, always threatening, always devising plans to obtain money from me under the terror that he would claim me in public as his son—perhaps on ’change some day—in the bank—at some public dinner—or even in my own house. I knew he was capable of this, only the long threat that he would do so answered his purpose better, because it procured him more gold.”

“ You must have been a precious family amongst yourselves.”

“ We were only two. I have no recollection of my mother, or of any one who ever taught me what was right. My father was a greedy, selfish man, and he did his best to make me the same—how successfully, I leave you to say.”

“ But you were not miserly like him.”

“ No, my selfishness took a more liberal and ostentatious turn, and I often gave largely, and spent freely, where

I thought it would serve my purposes to do so. The great secret of my success—and I *was* successful at one time to an astonishing extent—has been that my wits were sharpened in very early life for the purpose of cutting out my own course, and shaping my own ends, and that every faculty of my head and heart were devoted to one object. There was no love between my father and myself—such natures cannot love. All that I remember of his kindness was a chuckle of congratulation, and the reward of butter to my bread, if ever I came home and told him of some clever trick by which I had cheated another boy out of his sixpence, or obtained a dinner without having it to pay for.”

“May heaven have mercy upon your poor soul!” exclaimed Betsy. “And was this the way in which you were brought up?”

“It was,” replied the man. “Hardened, selfish, and daring; with nothing to lose, if I failed to succeed in my plans, I became in time a most lucky speculator—beyond all my most sanguine expectations: money seemed at one time actually to pour in upon me; and once the possessor of money, what else had I to fear? It is true my father troubled me, but this was only a petty annoyance, and I kept him down with trifling sums, which it was said that he buried in his garden. My father was a genuine miser. He loved gold for its own sake. I, his worthy son, loved gold for the distinction which it procured me, for that was my passion. I burned to be a man of distinction in the world of business—to walk over the heads of other men, and to hear them say what I could do and dare, in the way of building, and purchasing, and carrying all before me—that was the music to which my pulse beat time, and truly has it led me to the dance of death.”

"But had you never better thoughts and kinder feelings?"

"Perhaps I had once, but I will not think about them now."

"It strikes me that this is the very time, of all others, to think about them."

"What, now, when bloodhounds are after me? Am I to sit puling and maudling under a hedge, and so deliver myself up to justice, and make a picture for print-shops, and a tale for story-books?"

"But what else do you mean to do?"

"Ah! there's the mystery I cannot solve; or only solve with this—or this;" and he showed first a pistol, and then a small phial, both which he carefully returned to their hiding-place.

"You talk like a fool," said Betsy. "You show me only the keys by which you mean to open a certain great door. Why, you may open that door any day, but when you have passed through it, you'll be the same man still—still hating God and man—still your own miserable self, burning, howling, for ever and ever; and no other door then to open, and let you through after that; but all closed in with the huge family and brotherhood of devils, hating one another, and you more than all, because you never knew the touch of kindness, nor had a green spot in your heart, where any beautiful or wholesome thing might grow."

"Perhaps I had once, Betsy."

"When?"

"I remember when I first knew what it was to be loved by a young, and pure, and trusting woman. It took me by surprise. I had not known that there was anything like that on earth. But that passed by. I threw it from me, and even grew in time to sicken at the thought."

"And did you never feel the same comfort in human love again?"

"Oh, yes. There was a little fairy head of golden hair that used to lie so softly on my bosom. Hark! hush! not a word. Do you see anything behind that bush?"

Betsy went softly to the spot, and returned with a firmer tread. "There's nothing," she said, "but a sheep grazing on the bank. I want to know whether you are acquainted with the situation of that poor head now."

"I do know something, yet scarcely dare conjecture what. Nor should I linger here, of all places in the world, but that I am desperate about that child, and feel as if I could not leave her. Something tells me she is ill, perhaps dying."

"Something tells you truly, then. I believe the doctors think her case a very hopeless one."

The father struck his brow, and then looking up towards the moon, he muttered through his teeth—"And I shall never meet her in that far-off heaven to which she is going!"

Feeling that the great point for which she lingered in this dangerous and by no means agreeable position, was yet unattained, and even unapproached, Betsy tried to lead the conversation back to the time of the great failure, and to different circumstances which had taken place then.

"I should have thought," she continued, "that you would rather have fled your country at that crisis, than have stayed robbing and murdering here."

"I neither robbed nor murdered, by design," said he. "Like many other persons under the pressure of a desperate crisis, I forgot the most essential things—I forgot to take money with me, and I forgot to obtain a passport to a foreign country. For the money, I tried once in vain.



Skulking in the dark, under a loathsome disguise, and distracted as I was, for I knew what a hue and cry was after me, I next tried that miserable old man. His heart was hard as flint towards me. He would not have given the value of a sovereign, to save me from drowning or flames. He turned upon me with threat for threat, until at last his voice grew louder, and I began to apprehend danger even in his detestable abode. In another moment he would have raised the neighbourhood. There was but one thing to be done. In his withered hand he clenched a bag of gold, the darling of his heart, for which he would have sold me over and over again. I wrenched it from him and escaped ; but of his death knew nothing, as I told you, until three days ago."

"And that other man—that poor innocent, my brother?"

"Of him I knew nothing, except that in my flight I had caught the impression of some one standing half-concealed beneath the ivy ; and, meeting two policemen, who, I thought, looked very suspiciously at me, a sudden thought flashed across my mind, and I told them to hasten on, for that I believed a robbery or some violence had been transacted in that garden."

"You monster of wickedness and falsehood!" exclaimed Betsy. "And what did you do then? for the rest I know, as it concerns poor James."

"I flew," continued the man, "I know not how, nor where ; but as the darkness closed, I found myself on board a vessel, hiding amongst ropes and casks on deck, not knowing to what part it was bound, and only hoping to escape from my own hated country ; for it *was* hated then—everything was hated by me, my own life most of all, and yet it was for that that I was flying !

"Well, I coiled myself up, like a reptile as I was,

leaving only a small opening through some matting, by which I could glare out upon the deck of the vessel, and see what was transacted there. For some time the tramping of feet, the rolling of casks, and the general bustle of preparing to go out with the tide, prevented my feeling the least alarm about being discovered in my hiding-place; but while I strained my eyes to see what passed on board, I heard the splash of oars immediately below that part of the vessel where I lay concealed, and peering into the darkness, I could discover a boat with half a dozen sturdy figures all closely muffled, who presently came on board, and asking for the captain, remained in close consultation for some minutes with him and the mate.

“‘I’ll take my oath,’ said the latter, ‘that I saw such a figure come on board; ‘and that he’s now somewhere about the ship, I’ve no more doubt than——’

“Before these words were fully uttered, I was lowering myself steadily, softly, down the side of the vessel by a rope. I had been an expert swimmer when a boy, and even if I sunk in the deep water, it was better so than to be seized by those vultures, and preyed upon for life. I did not sink, however. It seems to me that I can neither sink nor die, for what I have passed through since then, no mortal tongue can tell. I begin to doubt whether a bullet could penetrate this iron breast—whether the poison which I carry in my bosom could really destroy my life.”

“Does it ever occur to you,” said Betsy, in her gentlest tone, “that perhaps there may be something worth living for yet, even to you?”

“For me!” was the bitter and scornful reply; and it was accompanied with a sneering and half-frantic laugh, which produced no cheering or musical echoes from the

grave-stones and the old church-walls ; for it seemed alike to be mockery of the dead who slumbered below, and of the worship to which those walls were consecrated.

“Hush !” said Betsy, and she would have laid her hand upon his arm, but that he shrunk from her, as if her touch had been that of the executioner. “Be still,” she continued. “This place is very solemn, or ought to be, both to you and me. We have said a good deal about the past, I should like a few words with you now about what is to come !”

“What do you mean ?”

“I mean what is to be the *end* of all this skulking, and eaves-dropping, and midnight wandering amongst graves ?”

“And hunger, and beggary, and rags,” he went on, taking up the same subject ; “and sleep that is no sleep, stolen in deserted buildings and cow-sheds ; and flight from the sight of man, and terror at my own shadow, and dread of the darkness, and loathing of the light. I should like some one to tell me what is to be the end of it ?”

“The poorest child that ever read its Bible, or heard a Sunday sermon, could tell you that, if you don’t make a turn in the downward road you are going.”

“Turn ! how should I turn, or why ?”

“Because it is God’s will that you should turn ; and, therefore, he has shown you the way.”

“How do you know it is not his will that I should go on and on, to everlasting ruin and misery ? It looks very like it, I should say, just now.”

“No, no, nothing ever did or ever will look like that. Neither do you yourself, just at this moment, look like a man that God is sending either this way or that, according to *his* pleasure. You look to me more like a man standing up in defiance of God altogether, and saying—‘ Because I

have sinned against him, I will sin on, and he shall curse me, and I will be cursed.' ”

“ And how can I help that ? Look only at my position, Is there any virtuous family in the whole kingdom with whom I could sit down, or any reputable roof under which I could find a shelter ? Am I not hunted like a beast, and hated like something worse ? ”

“ And yet you yourself could put an end to all this hunting and hatred. ”

“ I, myself ? ”

“ Yes, you—you have it in your power even yet before you die, to obtain the blessings of children, and the prayers of good men. ”

“ I, what I ? the wretch who stands before you ? You know not to whom you are speaking—you cannot understand the fire that is at this moment burning out my heart. ”

“ Tears would help to quench it. ”

“ But whence are they to come ? ”

“ From prayers. ”

“ And what then ? ”

“ Just and righteous acts. ”

“ Of what description ? ”

“ Of self-sacrifice. ”

“ I have nothing to give up. ”

“ Then the effort will be the more easy. ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I mean that there is a poor innocent man at this moment lying within dark prison walls, under sentence of death for a crime which you yourself committed, and which, it seems, was not the crime of murder, after all. I mean that this man, though poor, held an honourable name, never sullied until now. I mean that he has a wife



and seven helpless children starving and miserable now, and about to become orphans by his death. I mean that all this has come about through the false accusation which you laid against him, when you thought only of saving yourself at any risk to him. I mean——”

“ But what has all this to do with the future ; for it was of *that* we were speaking ? ”

“ It has this to do with it ; that every day—every hour, you suffer that innocent man to be there, under a charge of which nobody in the world can clear him except yourself, you are guilty of murder, and falsehood, and blasphemy against everything true and holy—in short, you are condemning your own soul, and knocking for admission at those fiery gates, through which, if you enter, you know that you never can return.”

“ And what would you have me to do ? ”

“ Simply what is right.”

“ Deliver myself up to justice instead of him ? ”

“ Even so.”

“ And what should I gain by that ? ”

“ Gain ! you would gain more than the wealth of the whole world—more than all its merchandise, its shipping, its gold, and its splendour. You would gain peace to your soul.”

“ Do you believe I should ? ”

“ I know it.”

“ How can you know it ? ”

“ My Bible tells me so.”

“ It never tells me anything about peace. I used to read it once ; but, instead of making me happier, it only made me more wretched.”

“ Just as the healing medicine makes the suffering patient at first more sick. You have surely come to

that pass now, when not even the Bible can make you more miserable than you are."

"That is a true saying of yours, Betsy, and I believe you are a good woman. You nursed my children in their infancy, you comforted my wife, and you maintained my family when deserted by me. I see you watch over them still; for I have sharp eyes in my hunger and destitution, and I honour you, Betsy, at the same time that I almost feel to hate you."

"Hate me as you like, dear sir; I have often thought I hated you, but just at this moment, I would not hurt a hair of your poor head. If it was safe to do so, I would rather hire a roof to shelter it. And look here—hold out your hand. It is but a few shillings, poor thing, that I have by me; but they'll serve you for a day or two to buy bread."

The hand was stretched out—the shrivelled bony hand—for the whole figure of that wretched being had grown very spare, and, by his constant exposure to rain and wind, and want and weariness, his whole appearance was so changed, that his humble disguise was scarcely needed now to enable him to elude detection; for few indeed of the most penetrating and observant would have recognised in that forlorn and frightful creature, the once fine looking and gentlemanly man who had so recently taken a prominent place amongst the flourishing merchants of M——

The shrivelled hand was stretched out, for hunger is a pressing thing, and that little boon was freely, nobly, kindly offered. It was accepted with these sad words, uttered in a voice now scarcely audible—"And this is the woman whose brother is about to die instead of me!"

A long silence followed, in which the overburdened heart of that generous woman was lifted up in silent prayer, while tears, no longer to be repressed, were streaming from her eyes.

"Why are you weeping?" asked the man, at last, "for your brother, or for me?"

"For both; but I think chiefly for you."

"Why so?"

"You seem to me so *very* wretched."

"Why do you care for that?"

"Because you were my master once, and you are still the husband of my mistress, and the father of her children?"

"Is that the sole reason why you are sorry for me?"

"No, sir; beyond this, I am sorry for your soul. I cannot bear to think that you will perish, and perish wilfully, when yet I do believe you might be saved."

"Do you think they would hang me, Betsy, if I should deliver myself up?"

"I do not think they would; but whether they would or not, that has nothing whatever to do with the right and wrong of the case."

"Do you think there would not be great hootings, and yells, and pelting with eggs, and rubbish, as I was conveyed through the streets?"

"I think I could prevent any public exposure. I have many friends."

"You, a poor servant, and a woman, have many friends—I, a once wealthy merchant, and what the world calls a clever and influential man, have not one!"

"Yes, you have *one* friend still, a friend above all others in such a case as yours."

"To whom do you allude?"

“To the Saviour—the Saviour of sinners—the Saviour of the world.”

“But I can have no part in his salvation. I have forfeited all my claim.”

“And who has not? Look only to the thief upon the cross. You, it seems, are but a thief; and if you had even been a murderer, there would have been the same hope still—hope, even to the last, if you will but turn to him and live.”

“I cannot understand you, Betsy.”

“No, nor you never will unless you pray. Pray to have your eyes opened, and then you will see things differently, and many things dark now will look so bright and dear!”

“Betsy, I like to talk with you to-night, because I feel very lonely, and it is long—long since I have heard a human voice addressed to me in my own person; and I did not know that there was one being upon earth who would not mock, or cruelly reproach me. I think it would be better now that I should be left again in this deep solitude amongst the graves. And yet, I know that you desire from me some pledge or bond that I will save your brother. Betsy, I have not come to that yet; but, if you will meet me here to-morrow, at the same hour we met to-night, I shall be better able to tell you my decision. Now, can you trust me?”

“I can,” said Betsy, and she went her way, determined for that time, at least, that she would not be instrumental in using any more decisive means for bringing the criminal to justice.



## CHAPTER XXX.



ON returning to the history of Kate Staunton, it may be necessary to remind the reader that we have to go back to the promised meeting which she had ventured upon, under the belief that it would be the last, in all probability, for years to come. There was something in this reflection both sad and solemn in itself ; but, in addition to this, her young heart was made even more sad that morning, and her thoughts more solemn, by the intelligence which had arrived late on the previous evening, of the serious and sudden illness of her grandfather at Hatherstone.

“If I might but go to him,” she said many times, when alone in her own chamber, “if I might but help to nurse the dear old man, what a privilege I should esteem it !” With these thoughts she had sunk to sleep, and on awaking in the morning her conviction was the same, that even if her grandfather had lost all consciousness of who was near him, and could not even recognise her form or voice, it would just now be her highest happiness to fly to Hatherstone, and stand by the side of that gentle faithful Margaret, whom she remembered with such deep affection, to learn of her the performance of

all kind and soothing offices, along with the higher duties of patience and resignation to her lot.

And Kate was the more anxious to go, because her present position in the Ashley family was becoming a very painful as well as an anxious one. It was evident, even to her inexperienced eyes, that the only member of the household to whom she was attached, was becoming more and more weighed down with perplexities and apprehensions ; and although, individually, she might entertain the hope of soothing him by her kindness and affection, there was little good really to be done where the numbers on the opposite side were so many ; there was, in fact, but little good in any soothing, or persuasion, or peace-making of hers, where her aunt and cousins were perpetually bearing down whatever decision of purpose or firmness of principle she had attempted to build up. It is hard for any kindly disposed heart to forsake one who has grown dependent upon the habitual expression of its tenderness ; and Kate Staunton felt this in connection with her uncle to its greatest extent. But, on the other hand, her instrumentality was only that of soothing at best ; it did him no further service ; it might rouse him for a moment, but it could not keep him going in a more decided and determined course ; and the very act of soothing without strengthening, where so much strength was needed, was to her more distressing than to absent herself altogether.

It was not, however, a mere question of pain or of comfort to herself, which Kate was now so frequently discussing. She had reason to feel, if she did not otherwise understand, that her presence in the family was no longer wished for by her aunt and cousins. There was, in fact, no more to be gained by her now. " Papa had lately grown so sullen and so stingy," that the lessons of the different

masters had been greatly abridged ; and now that " poor old grandpapa was dying, it made very little difference whether she was at the hall or not. Insensible as he was, it seemed quite impossible that any of her artful ways should effect a turn in her favour, or do the rest of the family any harm."

But what could be done by an orphan girl thus situated ? Everything at Hatherstone, she was told, remained in a state of quiet and stagnation ; the master himself, incapable of taking any part in the conduct of his affairs, and requiring the utmost care to keep his mind unruffled by surrounding things. To whom, then, was it possible for Kate to appeal ? She thought often of her beloved Margaret, the friend of her childhood ; but even upon her anxieties she felt it would now be unsuitable to intrude.

It may easily be supposed, that even beyond the circle of his own immediate family, Arnold Lee was a friend—an adviser—a rock of shelter to all who knew and trusted themselves to the worth and energy of his character ; and Kate Staunton had not neglected to communicate with him, from the first intelligence received of the ruin and calamity in which he was involved. It was by his advice that she had not sought her aunt and Lucy, as natural feeling would have dictated ; and now that her own situation demanded the exercise of cool judgment, as well as right feeling, she sought his advice for herself. Her own circumstances, however, being of a nature more easily spoken than written about, she determined to attempt a personal interview with her cousin at the house of Mr. Dalrymple, where, even if he should be absent, she promised herself the satisfaction of seeing Betsy Burton, and hearing from her many of those circumstances connected

with her aunt and cousins, which it would scarcely have been delicate to discuss with one so deeply involved as Arnold, in the ruin and disgrace of his father.

Kate Staunton had no personal acquaintance with Dorothy Dalrymple. She had heard of her frequently through Mrs. Norris, who visited with the Ashleys, and through her cousin Frederick, who spoke of her in the most enthusiastic terms; but for some cause or other, he failed to communicate to his mother and sisters any sympathy with his own feelings. So far from this, they rather took an opposite view of the case, and amused themselves by turning into a bitter kind of ridicule, the praises of Mrs. Norris, as well as his own.

In vain, in their presence, did young ladies expatiate upon the charming adventure of visiting a prison; of the desire they themselves felt to do the same; how interesting they thought it to be benevolent, and enthusiastic, and all that kind of thing: the Misses Ashley were quite of a different opinion, and considered the whole affair "a great piece of folly; and as for that bold, presuming, upstart girl, it was very easy to understand how she was studying to get up a character, to make herself singular, and to be generally talked about."

It was impossible for Kate Staunton to listen to remarks of this kind every day, knowing nothing to weigh against them in the opposite scale, without entertaining some slight prejudice against Dorothy herself; for if there was one thing more than another amongst what passes current in society, which Kate held in abhorrence, it was that pretension to benevolence and right feeling which is merely studied for effect; and especially in a woman was this assumption hateful in her eyes. If, therefore, she felt a natural curiosity to see a young lady of



whom she heard so much, and such varied reports, she felt also fully assured that their meeting would lead to no other result than the gratification of an idle wish, to behold an individual, who, to use the language of her cousins, was "setting up for a character."

With these feelings, Kate Staunton pursued her way to the residence of Mr. Dalrymple ; and had reached the door before she recollected that the office, not the house, would be the place for finding her cousin Arnold. Here was indeed a dilemma ; but still she determined to proceed, in the hope of obtaining that interview with Betsy Burton upon which she had calculated. After knocking very quietly—for Kate had many misgivings about the propriety of what she was doing—the door was slowly opened by an old servant-woman, whose countenance and manner denoted that she was not in the most amiable humour ; and, on asking for Miss Dalrymple, the woman, without further parley, threw open a door which opened into the passage, disclosing a scene, as little in accordance with the *pretension* which Kate had been led to expect, as could well have been imagined.

It was, in fact, a great dress-making occasion ; Betsy Burton, seated in the midst of a mountain of material for outside and in, stiffening, and puffing, quilling, and frilling ; and Dorothy on the floor, apparently in her own person only a fragment of the general disorder ; while Aunt Anne, vexed beyond measure, at the suddenness of the surprise, after all her strict orders and injunctions to the contrary, flew out of the room after old Bridget—no doubt intent upon visiting summary judgment upon that perverse individual, who, upon the present occasion, as upon many others, had just quietly taken her revenge upon the company within the parlour, for the many slights of

which she now believed herself to be the undeserving recipient.

"Pray don't let me disturb you; and pray don't mind me," were very natural expressions from the intruder on such an occasion. And while Betsy gathered up her heap into a smaller compass, and placed the only unoccupied chair nearer the fire, Dorothy started up, and looking laughingly round—perhaps, seeing also by one glance into the clear sensible countenance of her visitor what kind of person she had to do with, said frankly, without the slightest hesitation, and at the same time holding out her hand, not ungracefully—"Miss Staunton, I think. You see what a beautiful mess we are in; but pray take a seat if you can, without sitting upon my best silks. You see, we all thought the day was cold, and my father cannot be brought to believe that our dress-making deserves a fire up-stairs; so we made ourselves very comfortable here, depending upon the faithfulness of Bridget; and it seems we were all too busy to hear your knock."

"I believe I did knock very faintly," said Kate, "for my heart misgave me as I reached the door; because my errand was to a young gentleman, and I might have known I should not find him here."

"A most unlikely place," observed Dorothy, "unless my aunt has something of the kind smuggled under her work." And she lifted up a whole arm-full of satin, as if to ascertain the fact.

"My chief business was with my cousin, Arnold Lee," said Kate. And she fancied, as she spoke, that a sudden flush spread over Dorothy's face; but she was not sure, for it was almost as suddenly averted, and bent down, and her hands busy with her work. After a few moments, however, she asked abruptly—"Is Arnold Lee your cousin?"

"Yes," replied Kate; "cousin, and friend. I might almost say brother; for there is nothing in the world I could not ask him to do for me, and to advise me in."

"He seems to me to be a kind of universal grandfather," said Dorothy, with the bright spot still upon her cheek, and her eyes still fixed upon her work.

"You are doing that quite wrong," said Betsy, in an undertone, and taking the work out of her hand.

But Dorothy had now recovered her self-possession, and rising from her seat, she disengaged herself entirely from the work, and approaching nearer to her visitor, began to converse with her in a grave and earnest manner; which, however, she was not in the habit of keeping up for any great length of time, let her company be who they might.

"I have heard so much," said she, "from this good woman, of the misfortunes and suffering of your cousin's family, that the subject with me has assumed a kind of sacredness; and I would not dare to speak of it except with those who feel for them in their afflictions, beyond what the world is accustomed to feel."

"If you have heard from Betsy of their misfortunes," said Kate, "I am sure you have heard of their virtues—of the angel goodness of my aunt, and the sweet gentleness of Lucy."

"I understand," said Dorothy, "that Lucy is ill—very ill."

"Indeed?" said Kate, "I had not heard that;" and she appealed to Betsy to tell all the particulars. When these had been gone through—so far, at least, as they were known—she turned again to Betsy, and said—"I was about to ask for a private interview with you, in order that we might speak more freely on this subject;

but now that I have seen Miss Dalrymple, and heard her speak so kindly, I do not mind saying anything before her, which I would say to you alone."

Dorothy, of course, proposed to retire; but Kate begged she would remain, and then went on. "I want to consult you as a friend, Betsy; for since I cannot see Arnold, you are the next adviser likely to give me good counsel. I rather want a home; and wish you to tell me, whether you think I could be useful to my aunt and cousins, just now. Surely I could help to nurse poor Lucy?"

Betsy shook her head. "I don't think," she said, "that you, or anybody else, has the least idea how they are living."

"As to that," said Kate, "I should not think of it a moment."

"But *they* might," observed Betsy. "I have heard say that pity is a painful thing. And however that may be, it is often pleasanter to be pitied at a distance, than quite close, as we may say. It seems sometimes almost as if people put spectacles on to look into one's misery. There's a good deal of that in the world; and then they *talk* about it so."

As Betsy said this, she glanced up at Dorothy, for in her memory there was a painfully vivid recollection of the talk which her brother's case had occasioned; nor was the *nature* of that talk forgotten. As she did this, she was surprised to see the unusual gravity which marked the countenance of her young mistress.

"They *do* talk," said Dorothy, after musing for a few minutes. "If one should happen to swing in a gibbet one's self how they would talk then! Why Mrs. Norris would give parties every day through the whole winter on the strength of it."



"You are very complimentary to your friends," observed Kate.

"Friends!" exclaimed Dorothy, laughing. "I wonder where they are."

"I thought you had so many," said Kate, "and that the number was increasing every day."

"And don't you know the secret of all this?" asked Dorothy.

"No," replied her visitor.

"I can tell you all about it," continued Dorothy, "in a very few words. It is that I amuse them. They have no amusement in themselves, and I just supply what they want, to enable them to endure the weariness and monotony of life. Sometimes I laugh for them—sometimes I cry for them—sometimes I tell them stories—sometimes I listen to theirs, but not very often. Altogether I 'roar you an 'twere a nightingale;' and so they like me very much at their parties. But look you here—if a single ache should come into this poor head, or a single pang into this poorer heart—if this busy tongue should grow weary, or any other function should fail to do its business at their bidding, where should I be then, with all my friends and all my lovers, too? For you must know, this precious farce, in which I am the chief actor, has its mockery of love, as well as friendship."

"You are too bitter against the world," observed Kate. "For one so flattered and admired as you are, it strikes me that you are rather ungrateful."

"Oh no, I am not," exclaimed Dorothy, immediately changing her tone of voice, and expression of countenance. "I am only too grateful, for I go to all their parties, do just as they bid me, and play off every art I possess for their amusement."

"But you *like* doing so," very naturally observed Kate.

"Oh yes, I like it very much," replied Dorothy. "I like nothing else better, because I know nothing else. Only when I see a clear, sensible face like yours, and one other face that I once saw, the thought comes over me—what a puppet, what a fool, I am making of myself for these people, not one of whom would give up a party to sit alone with me if I was dying."

"You are too severe," said Kate. "I always think the world with which we associate is like the parent block from which that little fragment *self* has been broken."

"You are right," replied Dorothy, "and I certainly do not pretend to be better than my neighbours ; but I sometimes think if I had one honest-hearted friend who cared for my real good, I should be very different from what I am. Do you think there is such a friend in the world?"

"No doubt there are many such ; but you appeal to one who knows little of the world ; and beyond this, I myself am not very rich in friends. I do not, however, blame the world for this."

"How, then, do you account for it. You seem very frank, and social, and kind-hearted."

"One may be all that, and yet be very little cared for in society ; while, on the other hand, a person may be a great pet with society, and not possess one of these good qualities."

"Ah ! it is your turn to be severe now."

"Not at all. I have no pique against the world or society whatever. I have done nothing for the world : what does the world owe me, or what have I a right to expect from it ? If I had spent health and wealth in serving it—in really and truly serving it—I believe I

should feel something at being utterly contemned; but, as I said before, I have done nothing to obtain the friendship of the world, and my circumstances as an orphan girl, altogether unprovided for, have placed me rather in the background, independently of my appearance."

Kate Staunton said this without the slightest blush, simper, or other symptom of mock modesty. She believed the faithful little looking-glass which stood in her own chamber more implicitly than she would have believed the united testimony of a whole phalanx of lovers, had such been at her feet declaring she was beautiful; and she knew, that although health and cheerfulness, and the strictest regard to neatness and good taste in all personal matters, might prevent her ever being repulsive, or even positively plain, she must enter into society at a considerable disadvantage with the many graceful and lovely forms which she found there, and whose superior charms she could admire without envy.

When Kate Staunton spoke of her own appearance, therefore, it was in the same simple, unaffected, and indifferent manner in which she would have spoken of the appearance of her bonnet or her parasol. In both cases, if one quality alone was at fault, and that a superficial one, the usefulness and value of the whole need not necessarily be lost sight of, or depreciated, for that one fault. Very foreign, then, would it have been to the nature of Kate Staunton, either to murmur in her own heart that she was not beautiful, or to draw attention to the subject in such a manner as to call forth attestations to the fact that she was, what her own clear eyes and truthful mind assured her she was not. "I have only the more need to be cheerful and neat," she was accustomed to say; "and if I cannot charm in society, I can be charmed myself."

With this impression on her mind, Kate Staunton was always at liberty to see what was required in the society around her. If any little difficulty occurred which a quick eye and a ready hand could adjust, Kate was the person to step forward, with silent foot, and, in the most unobtrusive manner, to set the matter right. If any one was slighted or overlooked, Kate was sure to find them out; or if an ill-chosen subject, likely to give offence or occasion pain, was begun, Kate was always the one to ward it off, by some ingenious turn. It would not be possible, however, to specify the innumerable services which a girl of good sense and true heart, like Kate, is capable of doing to society, simply from the fact of being wholly divested of the idea of shining in it herself. It is wonderful, too, how much time is thus obtained for studying human nature, for gaining information—for anything, in short, for which society is worth seeking.

It would not have been easy to place in close contact two more opposite characters than Kate Staunton and Dorothy Dalrymple. The one abounding in good sense, cheerful, contented, and yet prudent and calculating; the other, capricious, daring, ill-informed, and worse-disciplined, yet occasionally gay beyond reasonable bounds, and then disappointed and dissatisfied, because always without a right ambition. But beyond the difference of constitution and habit, which so widely separated them, Kate Staunton was a Christian in belief—in hope—in constant endeavour; and though sadly deficient in her daily life, and falling far, indeed, below the high standard she looked up to, still not despairing, but often in her orphan solitude seeking, both with prayers and tears, forgiveness for the past, and better guidance for the day to come. It was a deep secret this which Kate enjoyed, and one which



formed the root and groundwork of her constant cheerfulness. It was a secret which had first been taught her by the good Margaret, when but a child—a wild, strange child, who had her fits of thoughtfulness ; and then it was that Margaret, in her simple, humble way, would talk to her of sin, and death, and of the blessed Saviour ; and then she would read to her out of that precious book, and often prayed at night, beside her bed—soft, simple, childlike prayers, that fell like dew upon the little heart, and could never be forgotten.

END OF VOL. I.







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